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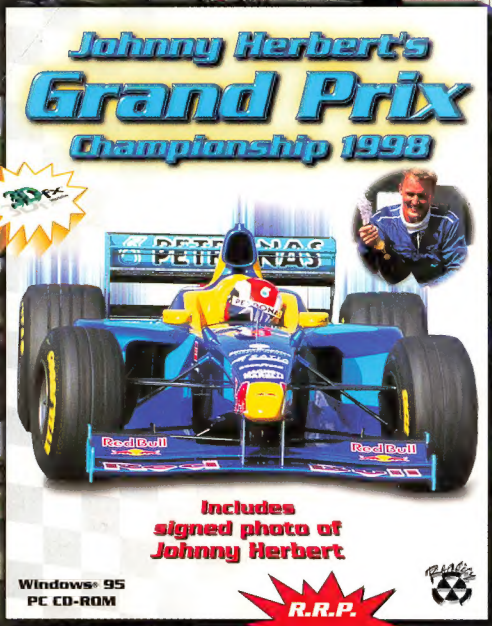

Johnny Herbert July '98

"The reason I agreed to endorse this product was that although I was really impressed with the fantastic graphics I was given the opportunity to make sure the actual driving and handling of the cars was as realistic as possible.

PC Gaming World September '98

- Looks to beat an arcade racer, plus accurate simulation to match the best.
- Level of detail is impressive, lookswise it has the lot.

PC Zone "Benelux" August '98

- JHGPC 98 was one of the extra special PC Game surprises at the E3 Show. Keep an eye out for the new software publisher Midas.

PC Player (Germany) September '98

- ★★★★ (four star award) I wished Formula 1 '97 had handling like this.

PC Joker (Germany) August '98

- A remarkable racing game. Arcade racing fans will flip out.

Ultimate PC July '98

- This terrific new racing simulator comes with the guarantee of one of Formula one's biggest names. Johnny Herbert has helped to design the tracks and gameplay to bring you a truly exciting game.

PC Powerplay (Australia) August '98

- JHGPC 98 will have the same effect on gamers as GP 2 did all those years ago. It is the ONLY realistic Formula 1 simulation available.
- JHGP is to Formula 1 sims what Falcon 4.0 will be to flight sims. Nothing comes even remotely close.
- The very first time you drive JHGP you know in your heart that this is how it really is. Suddenly, every other "sim" out there is now just a game.
- If you're a Formula 1 fan, this is the sim you've been waiting all your life for.

PC Gamer Autumn '98

- 85% - Game of Distinction.
- Complex and involving, endlessly ridable, enjoyable and satisfying. Floor it.
- Forget your arcade racers, Castrol Honda Superbikes is GP2 or TOCA on a motorbike.
- It has all the elements that make GP 2 and TOCA so spectacular.
- Superbike is a wonderful game.

Computer Gaming World October '98

- ★★★★ (four star award).
- TV Quality graphics; dynamic tracks; the first true motorcycle racing sim.
- Visually Superbike rules. Incredible 3D-accelerated graphics.

Mega Score July '98

- 96% - Bestseller

Micro Revue (13)

- 90% - Top Hit

PC Zone "Benelux" October '98

- 94% - Classic Game
- You bet, a excellent and realistic motorbike simulator.

Power Unlimited September '98

- 90% - Top Hit
- For every motorbike fan this game is a compulsory buy.

PC Format "Portugal" September '98

- 94% - Star Game

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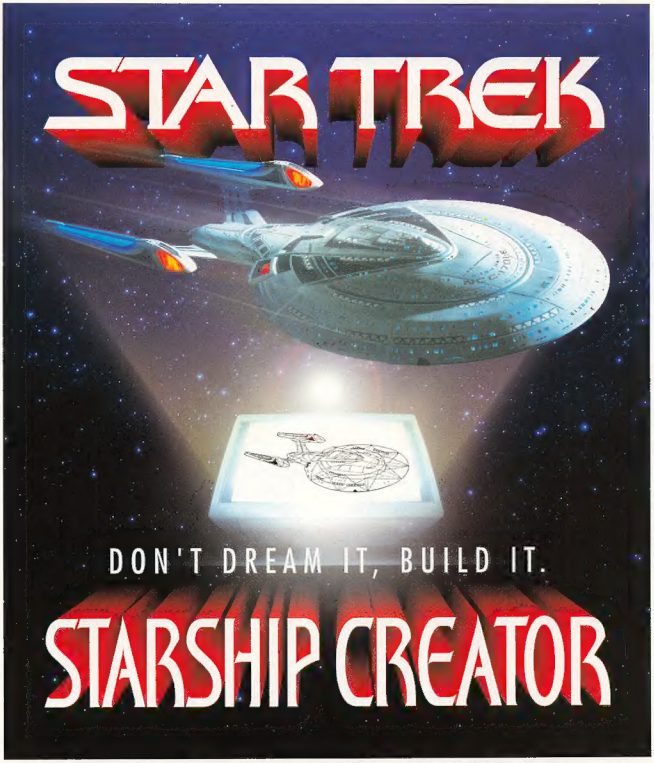

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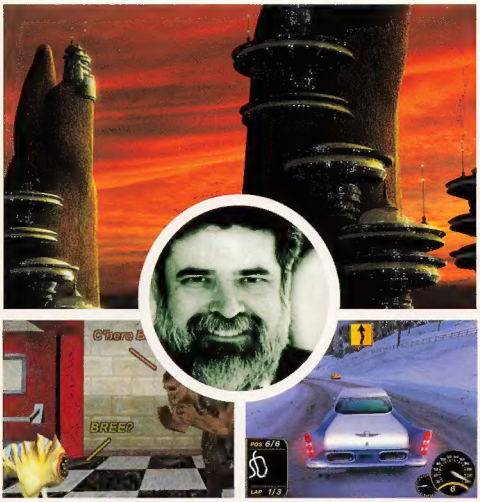

Top: Alpha Centauri
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Middle left:
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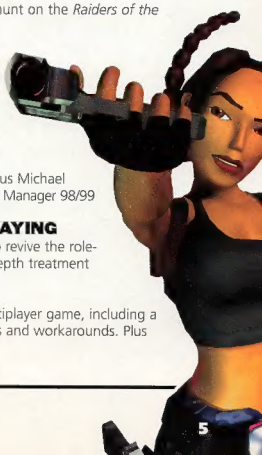

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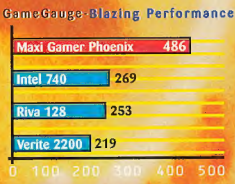

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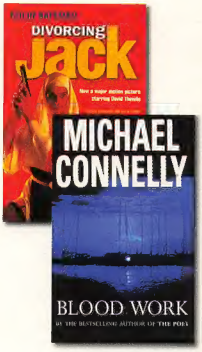

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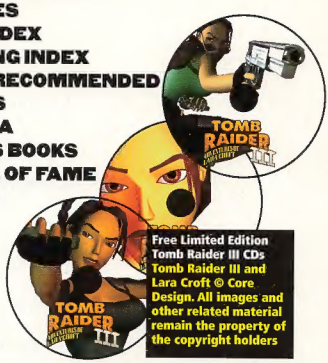

Top Circle: Babylon 5
Top: Giants
Middle left: Max Payne
Middle right: Heroes Of Might And Magic III
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COMMUNICATIONS

What's the latest state of play with C&C 2: Tiberian Sun? Things seem to have gone very quiet over at Westwood and I wondered what's happening.

Tom Williams, Cambridge

Westwood has never been known to rush a game – it has built up the C&C brand over the past four years and the last thing it wants to do is release a sub-standard version and damage its reputation (unlike some other developers we could name). Rest assured though, we had a sneak look at the game recently and can reconfirm that it looks fab. It's further on in development than you might think and we should see it around March.

Would that you were right that the Sale Of Goods Act gave the chance of redress against publishers who promulgate faulty computer games. Unfortunately, you have failed to note the distinction between the medium on which the games are published – the CD – and the software itself. The CD is goods, and if faulty you can sue (and who sues for 50p?). The software is intellectual property, and you buy a licence to use a copy. We've no rights on our side of the Atlantic either!

Paul Harrison, via email

While what you say is broadly true, it may not be as bleak as that. If the software can be established to be truly unusable for the purpose it was bought then this could be what's called a 'fundamental' breach of the licence contract and then you could well be entitled to redress.

I'm a huge fan of flight simulators, enjoying the freedom to navigate over spectacular landscapes and explore vast ranges of territory without the linearity of other 3D games. However, my suspension of disbelief is always ruined as I approach the ground, where stunning-looking cities and forests turn into flat collections of blurred aerial photographs badly joined together, and surface features are modelled as a handful of incongruous-looking objects. Wouldn't it be great if the likes of Microsoft, Eidos and NovaLogic took the time and effort to add a third dimension to their aerial bitmaps? I look forward to the day when a flight simulator will let me fly low over my city so I can follow a familiar road system to my house and wave to a little image of me in the window!

Ian Drumm, via email

LETTER OF THE MONTH

It's not only bugs that are a problem in games – it's making them hack-proof, too. In a way you expect there to be bugs – my favourite's the one in Quake II when you save your game while on an elevator and then, when you reload, you fall for an eternity and there's nothing you can do about it. But hacking in a multiplayer environment is another thing altogether. It's no fun entering a game and having your Level 32 warrior being whacked to shit by some third-rate Level 1 god-moder with his billion-plus damage and enchanted dagger of f*@!wit-ism while two other thieves are robbing your inventory blind using some cheat they've worked out. I don't care how long Blizzard takes to complete Diablo 2 as long as it makes it hack-proof.

Robyn Woods, via email

ADVERTISEMENT

Grim Fandango (Issue 24) a classic game – are you mad? What about the horrible and totally unnecessary control system, which most of the time gets in the way more than it helps? And how can you begin to have quality puzzles when you can't even use objects together in your inventory? Monkey Island 2 is still the best for me.

Peter Lake, via email

It's all a matter of personal taste. While we agree with you that the point-and-click interface is preferable, we didn't feel that the control system detracted enough from the superb story, dialogue, graphics, atmosphere and sheer size for us to knock a mark off.

How can you justify giving Wargasm five stars (Issue 24) when you say things like 'the flawed map interface often causes havoc in the heat of battle'? It seems to me you're saying the game falls short in its most important aspect. Do you have shares in DiD, or what?

Lee Darley, Hull

We'd like to have shares in DiD, but sadly no, we don't. The thing about Wargasm is that it's not all about the tactical screen. Yes, this is an important interface, but the real strength of the game lies in its 3D action, which is nothing short of superb. If it had been classified as a Strategy & Wargaming genre title it would have scored less, but it's one of a kind as far as action games go. We're still playing it six weeks later. It's a classic because it's a benchmark against which others (if anyone tries a game like this again) will be measured.

Is BT's Home Highway for real? The pricing seems a long way off, if it is going to have any hope of attracting the UK gamers. And to get any real speed advantage you need to use both lines, which makes the call twice as expensive – in the region of £1.20 per hour.

Mike Abell, via email

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It looks as if our decision last month not to review pre-release versions of SiN and Tomb Raider III is vindicated. Both titles disappoint – though for very different reasons. Tomb Raider III through reasons that are not really its own fault – it's just that the underlying engine is now showing its age altogether too much. That and the fact the level design is occasionally pedestrian. It's almost as if Core's eye had already moved on beyond to begin to deal with the issue of where next for Lara. For a taste of what Tomb Raider II ought to have been take a look at the Heretic II review this issue. SiN is a different matter. Basically it stands poor comparison with its arch-rival Half-Life and it's a bit shoddy that already its developers have had to post a Web-downloadable 19Mb bug-fix patch. Cynics might suggest the title was released prematurely…

> It's clearly Quake II's multiplayer mantle that Valve is going after with Half-Life

With Half-Life at last there is a contender for Quake II's long-undisputed crown as best multiplayer game. Not quite yet mind. For the moment multiplayer Half-Life is a very different kind of experience – more a casual blast than a competition game. For now Half-Life cannot match Quake II's speed, integrity of multiplay system or wealth of mods and teamplay options. But the arrival of the Team Fortress II for Half-Life add-on pack in late spring will change all that. Team Fortress was *the* success of QuakeWorld – a kind of of souped up Capture The Flag with character classes – and its sequel will be built for Half-Life not Quake II. It's clearly Quake II's mantle that Valve is going after. Valve currently has its team working flat-out on multiplayer development so that when Team Fortress II arrives Half-Life will be ready for it.

While we're in the area I think it's worth taking Valve to task for its overzealous copyright protection on Half-Life. Yes, the game is magnificent. And yes, Valve deserves to benefit as richly as possible from its creation. But early versions of the game featured some innovative new anti-piracy methods which ended up delivering serious hassle for the legitimate gamer. The program was built to self-check, on launching a game, the length of CD audio tracks on the CD. Apparently this was likely to trap pirate copies. Unfortunately it didn't work with legitimate copies with certain types of CD player. In multiplay using the key code supplied on the box you should be able to install the game legitimately on up to five PCs. But again with early versions there were problems. Even on a LAN with no Internet access, the program would try to automatically hook up to Valve's Web site to authenticate the key-code – and when that failed, installation either failed or was interminably delayed. While Valve's intentions are perfectly reasonable – trying to limit the effects of software piracy – such efforts are not to be applauded when they begin to obstruct legitimate gamers in pursuit of their sport.

And finally, still in the multiplayer arena, it's good to talk. In this issue we look at the Battlefield Communicator. This software – which is relatively simple to install and use – allows players wherever in the world they are to talk as they play. It will change online gaming for ever. Suddenly it's personal.

David Kelly, Editor-in-chief
Contact David by letter, or by email at david_kelly@zd.com

Henry
"Thin Ogre"
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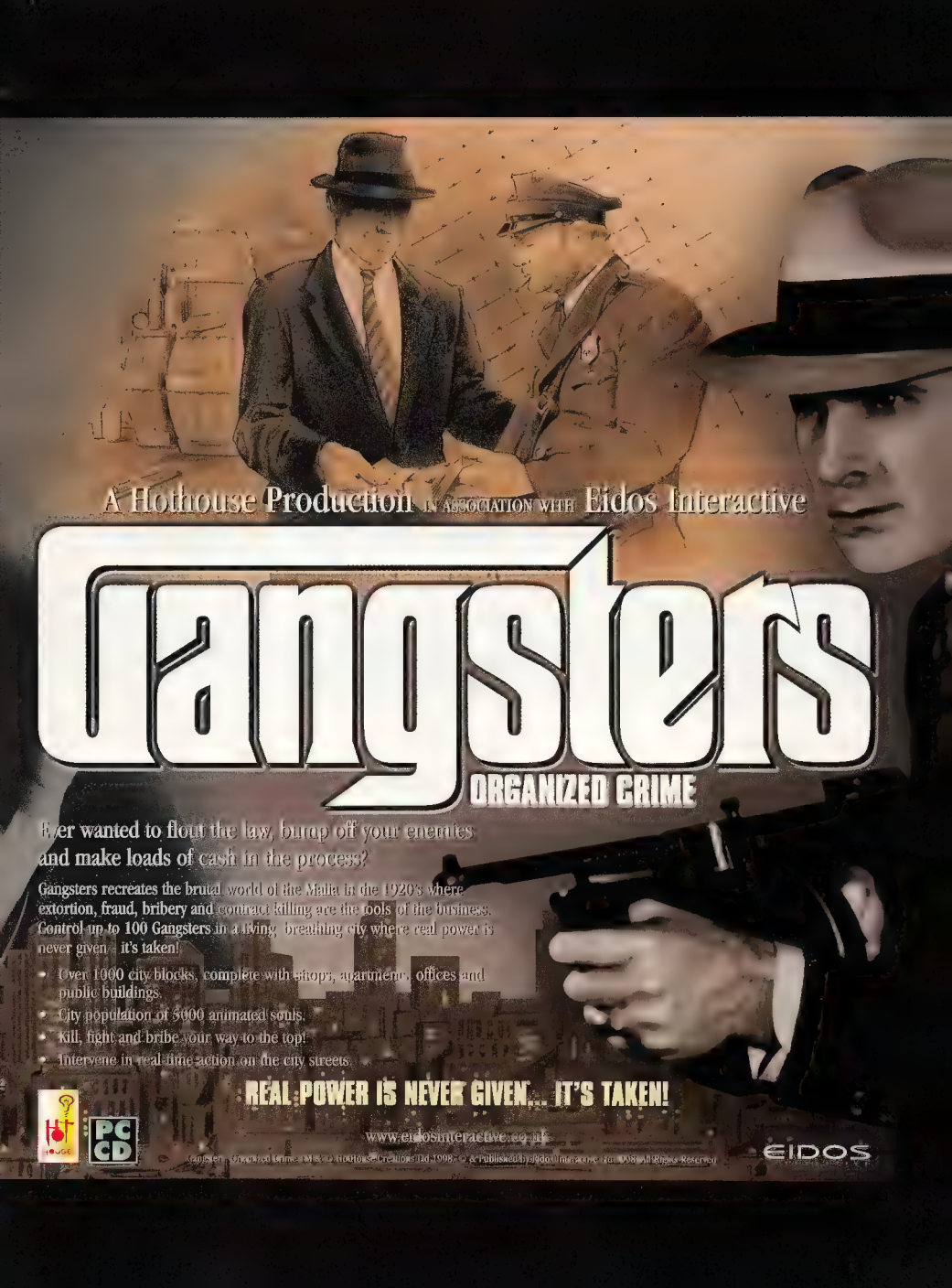
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Gangsters recreates the brutal world of the Mafia in the 1920's where extortion, fraud, bribery and contract killing are the tools of the business. Control up to 100 Gangsters in a living, breathing city where real power is never given - it's taken!
• Over 1000 city blocks, complete with shops, apartments, offices and public buildings.
• City population of 5000 animated souls.
• Kill, fight and bribe your way to the top!
• Intervene in real-time action on the city streets.
REAL POWER IS NEVER GIVEN... IT'S TAKEN!
www.eidosinteractive.co.uk
PC CD
EIDOS
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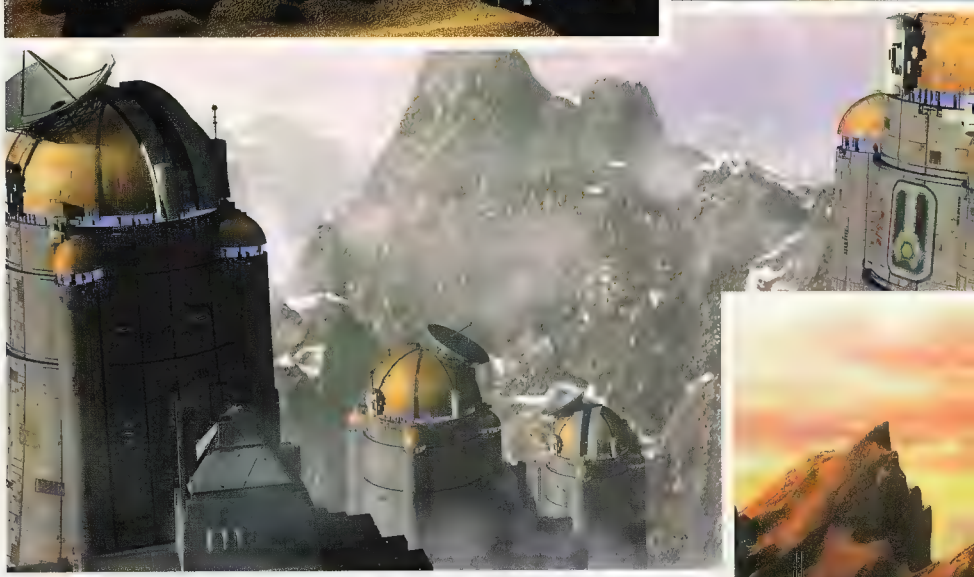
EYE CANDY



ALPHA CENTAURI EYE CANDY SPECIAL

Diverse landscapes abound on Alpha Centauri, the last stop on humanity's journey from a ruined planet earth. These are the renders though folks... the game looks somewhat different.

See page 40

Discovery consists of seeing

what everybody has seen

and thinking

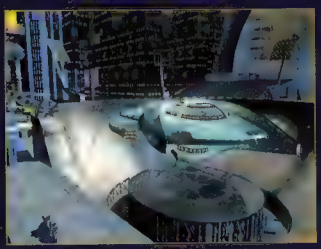
what nobody has thought.

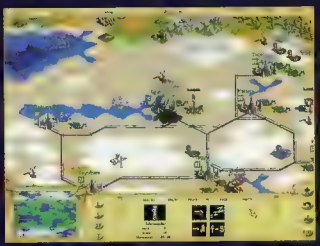
Albert Szent-Györgyi

The Future is in Your Hands
Lead an empire from primitive beginnings into the stunning sci-fi future of 3000 AD. Every decision you make has repercussions on your future world. Will you rule a grim, industrial jungle or a utopian society?

Not All Wars are Fought on the Battlefield
Add to your lethal military might with unconventional types of warfare, such as biological terrorism or religious conversion. A variety of units, buildings, governments, wonders, and research options are at your disposal.

Discover Who Among Your Friends Will Rule
Go head-to-head in multiplayer world-building. But remember – in war, even friends can become enemies. A nanovirus you release in one opponent's city may spread to others, leading you into a war with an unintended party.





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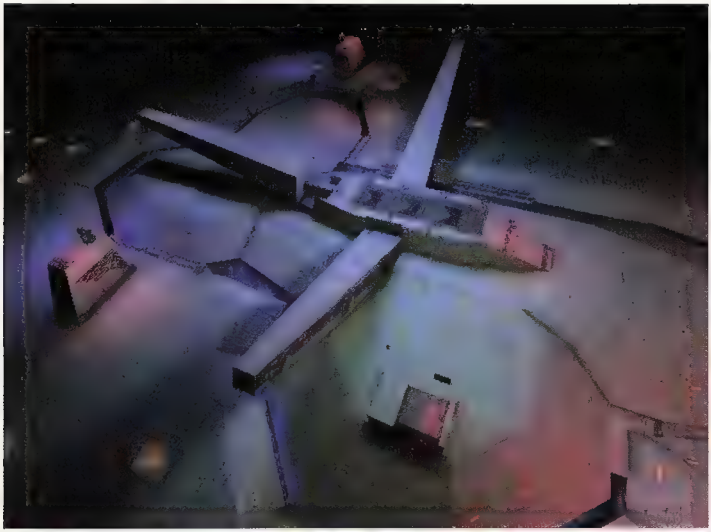
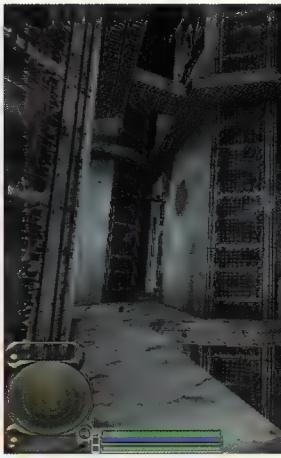
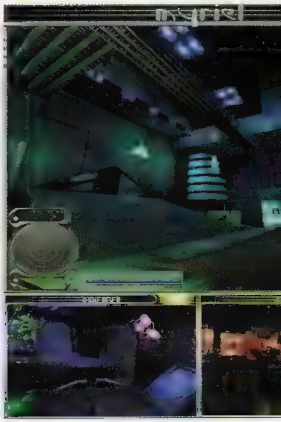
CALL TO POWER

www.activision.com



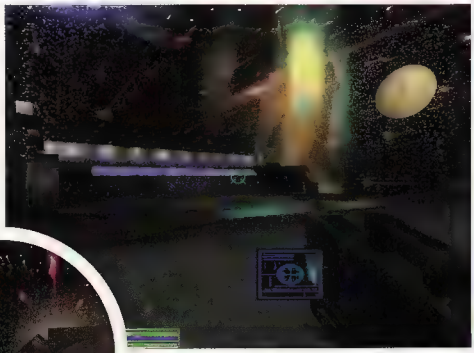


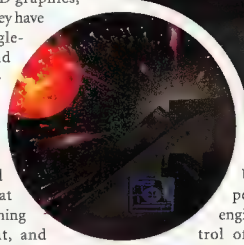


ACTION

HIRED GUNS

LABEL: Psygnosis
DEVELOPER: Devil's Thumb





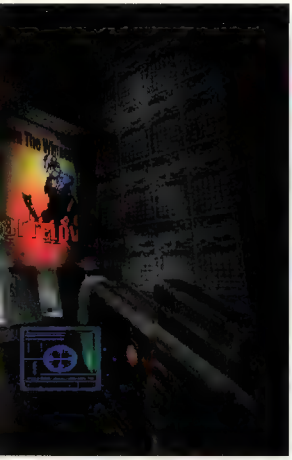
What can a first-person shooter do to distinguish itself these days? Visually, almost every title has jaw-dropping 3D graphics, gameplay-wise they have intelligent single-player modes and multiplayer deathmatches, while shotguns, rocket launchers, and rail gun equivalents are standard equipment. What we need is something a little different, and Psygnosis may just have found it with this squad-based variation on the theme.

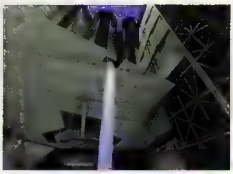
Before the 20th century, storyteller's favourite bogeymen were magicians and royalty. The modern pariahs are usually either aliens or big, faceless, omnipresent business conglomerates out for world domination – Hired Guns opts for the latter. Using Unreal's powerful graphics engine you take control of a four-strong squad of mercenaries intent on toppling a bevy of evil corporations.

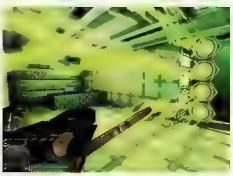
The four characters you control are Osverger, the strong man; Kirscher, the futuristic equivalent of a role-playing cleric who can heal others; Rorian, a mutant with night vision; and the ubiquitous token female figure, Myriel, a cyborg that can interface with computers as well as fight.

The twist in Hired Guns is that you control them all at the same time via a complex, but workable, graphic interface.

This promising approach is immediately apparent in the main game screen. A full third of the monitor is filled with the perspective of the character you're controlling at any given time. Along the bottom of the screen are three smaller windows reflecting the current view of the other team members. The main view updates in real-time at the highest available frame rate, while the three sub windows operate at lower frame rates in the interest of speed. You can select any character for direct control by double-clicking on their window. The upper-right portion of the screen is occupied by a game interface which allows you to control and issue orders to the rest of your team. This sounds cluttered, and indeed it is, but it's an organised chaos that works well. However, if you want simplicity you can select a full-screen mode where all you see is your active character's view.







The choice of orders include patrol, hide, snipe, and provide cover. Your forces can also be instructed to go into 'fury' mode, where they randomly run around a level firing at any enemy they encounter. Further determining your squaddies' behaviour is an AI adjuster that will colour their responses based on three priorities: health, orders, and objectives. Set a team member to watch their health and they'll retreat after taking a certain degree of damage. Characters with a high order priority will walk into certain death if you order them to, whereas those with high objective priority will focus their actions on fulfilling mission goals and may not heed your every order if it conflicts with this basic tenet.

The team interface will also allow you to set group formations, including diamond, tight, and line configurations. Additionally, a rally button will instruct your private army to make every effort to reach the active character's location. To help you with all this there will be plenty of keyboard shortcuts and the developers are promising customisable macros, too – especially useful if you opt to spend most of your time in full-screen mode.

Co-ordinating your team's actions and fully utilising each member's unique abilities will be the key to success. The example of teamplay we saw was a situation where an enemy sniper is preventing you from crossing a narrow bridge and entering a building. To defeat him you'll need to lay down covering fire to allow other members of the team to run across and flush him out. This emphasis on using the full team should be the rule rather than the exception as the design team is promising to build what they call 'tactically engaging levels'.

There will be a projected 17 weapons at your disposal, including a sniper rifle which features an incremental zoom for targeting enemies at different distances. This will take out most bad guys with a single, skull-shattering shot. It's sneaky and we like it. Multiplayer sessions will be revolutionised by the ability to set up players in sniping traps and team play.

Hired Guns should see the light of day next spring, so watch out for it.

THE PITCH: A new twist on first-person shooters – control four characters at once

THE PROSPECTS: It's unusual, looks interesting and it uses the Unreal engine. Furthermore you'll be able to 'blow up unprecedented amounts of scenery and furniture' according to the developer. We like...

DUE: Spring

FACTS

ResignatION Storm

ION Storm, Eidos's much hyped 'supergroup' developer, has lost several key members of its Daikatana and Anachronox teams. The eight departures include the lead level designer Sverre Kvernmo and programmer Jonathan Wright on Daikatana, lead level designer David Namasky on Anachronox and audio director Will Loconto. The erstwhile Storm troopers have formed a new developer, Bloodshot, which was immediately signed up by Gathering Of Developers, the publisher set up by another former Stormer, Mike Wilson. In addition, Corrinne Yu, director of advanced technology, has left to work at rival 3D Realms. ION Storm's John Romero was magnanimous about the departures, and wished them well in their new careers. But delays to the two affected games now seem inevitable.

Free editor for Combat Flight Sim

Microsoft has released a free mission editor for its World War II air combat game, Combat Flight Simulator. You can download it from: http://www.microsoft.com/games/combatfs/downloads.htm

PCGW READER OFFER

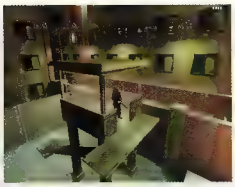
GRAND PRIX LEGENDS for only £19.99

How To Order: Inside this issue of PCGW you'll find the latest Cendant Software catalogue including information on current hits Half-Life and StarCraft and the new line-up for 1999, as well as Grand Prix Legends. To order GPL at this special PCGW discount price all you have to do is quote or enter the special order code '1967' when ordering by phone or from the Sierra website. The phone number and URL of the site are both listed on the front of the catalogue. **Enjoy...**

PIPELINE

Rules Of War	GT Interactive	Str/War	11 Dec
Rest Online >	Accolade	Action	11 Dec
Abe's Exoddus	GT Interactive	Action	11 Dec
Blunder Brigade	Interact Magic	Str/War	11 Dec
Moto Racer 2	Electronic Arts	Sim/Space	11 Dec
Oddworld	Infogrames	Action	11 Dec
Future Cops: LAPD 2100	Electronic Arts	Action	11 Dec
WWII: Fighters	Jane's	Sim/Space	11 Dec
Combat Pilot	The Associates	Sim/Space	11 Dec
Blood 2: The Chosen	GT Interactive	Action	11 Dec
Dark Vengeance	GT Interactive	Action	11 Dec
F1 Grand Prix 2	Power Plus	ReReleases	11 Dec
Sin Go	GT Interactive	Action	11 Dec
Worms Armageddon	MicroProse	Str/War	11 Dec
Quake II MP	id Software	Multimedia	11 Dec
The Biggest Games TBN	EA Classics	ReReleases	11 Dec
Test Driver 4 x 4	Accolade	Action	18 Dec
Test Drive 5	Accolade	Action	18 Dec
Pro 18 World Tour Golf	Psygnosis	Sports	18 Dec
Dungeon Keeper	EA Classics	ReReleases	18 Dec
Tiger Woods 99 – Vegas	EA Sports	Sports	18 Dec
Baldur's Gate	Interplay	Adv/RPG	18 Dec
Myth II: Soulblighter	GT Interactive	Str/War	18 Dec
Haven II	Essential Collect	ReReleases	18 Dec
Beavis & Butthead - Bung	GT Interactive	Action	18 Dec
Civ II + Conflicts in Civ	MicroProse	ReReleases	Dec
Star Wars: Droid Works	LucasArts	Str/War	Dec
Avengers Pinball	Inspired Pub	C & P	Dec
Top Of The Pops: Mix Fact	BBC Multimedia	Multimedia	Dec
Wing	Virgin	2nd	Dec
Zorro Pinball	Inspired Pub	C & P	Dec
Versailles DVD	Cryo Interactive	Adv/RPG	Dec
Roswell Pinball	Pin-ball Games	C & P	Dec
Tyrian Rhapsody	Vivid	C & P	Dec
NHL Hockey	Assembly	Sports	Dec
Playboy Pinball	Inspired Pub	C & P	Dec
Animal Hospital	BBC Multimedia	Multimedia	Dec
Chess System Tal 2	Oxford Softwks	C & P	Dec
Rival Realms	Digital Integ	Str/War	Dec
Fighter Squadron	Activision	Sim/Space	8 Jan
Heavy Gear II	Activision	Str/War	8 Jan
The Curse Of Monkey Isl	LucasArts Clas	ReReleases	8 Jan
Star Wars: Jedi Knight	LucasArts Clas	ReReleases	8 Jan
Outlaws	LucasArts Clas	ReReleases	8 Jan
Star Wars: Shadows Empire	LucasArts Clas	ReReleases	8 Jan
Star Wars: Supremacy	LucasArts Clas	ReReleases	8 Jan
Star Wars: X-Wing Vs TIE	LucasArts Clas	ReReleases	8 Jan
Sportscenter	Virgin	Misc	15 Jan
Saga: Rage Of The Vikings	Cryo Interactive	Str/War	15 Jan
ESPN Xgames Pro Boarder EA Sports		Action	15 Jan
Lean Lara Cricket '98	Codemasters	Sports	22 Jan
Wood	Electronic Arts	Action	29 Jan
Sid Meier's Alpha Cent	Electronic Arts	Str/War	29 Jan
TransAm Racing	GT Interactive	Action	29 Jan
NFL Quarterback Club 99	Acclaim	Sports	Jan 99
Strongest Game Of Go	Oxford Softwks	C & P	Jan 99
Virtual Pool 2 Deluxe	Interplay	C & P	Jan 99
Anthem	Fusion	Action	Jan 99
Blackstone Chronicles	Minoscape	Adv/RPG	Jan 99
Multimedia Encyclop 99	Grolier	Multimedia	Jan 99
Worms Armageddon	MicroProse	Str/War	Jan 99
Turok 2: Seeds Of Evil	Acclaim	Action	Jan 99
Ultimate Soc Man 98 Add	Sierra Sports	Sports	Jan 99
Dragonflight: Chronicles	Grolier	Adv/RPG	Jan 99
Unreal Level Editor	GT Interactive	Action	Jan 99
Unreal	Sierra	Sim/Space	Jan 99
A10-E Super Hornet	Digital Integ	Sim/Space	Jan 99
Lath	Black Friar	Adv/RPG	Jan 99
Rocky Horror Picture Show	Black Friar	Adv/RPG	Jan 99
Great Britain Scenery 3	Take 2	Sim/Space	Jan 99
NFL Fever	GT Interactive	Sports	Jan 99
Actua Golf 2	Premier Collec	ReReleases	Jan 99
Actua Soccer 2	Premier Collec	ReReleases	Jan 99

Compiled with assistance from HMV



ACTION/ADVENTURE

MAX PAYNE

LABEL: Gathering Of Developers/ Take 2

DEVELOPER: 3D Realms/Remedy Entertainment

You want an interactive Pulp Fiction? You might just be in luck. Max Payne is a story-driven third-person action game cum pulp thriller for grown-ups. Under development by Finnish team Remedy Entertainment (who have teamed up with 3D Realms for the project), Max Payne is going to be as big on attitude and storyline as it is on action. Mad, bad and black humoured from start to finish.

The game is set in modern day New York during the worst blizzard on record. Max, its hero, is the hard-assed cop who finds himself framed for the murder of his best friend and boss, and marked for death by the mob, his fellow police officers, and an underground organisation that Max was on the verge of exposing. Pretty much everyone is out to get Max, it seems. To really make his week, Max's family are slaughtered by a gang of drug-crazed junkies high on a previously unknown synthetic drug called Valkyr. More than slightly miffed, Max sets out to find his boss's murderers and track down the source of Valkyr. It's payback time.

The story unfolds within the game through character interaction, clue finding, information and exploration, and through between-level comic style hand-painted cut-scenes. Thus, Remedy swears, as well as leaving a trail of corpses it will keep the player guessing right till the end.

Two camera modes show the New York City setting and the firefights (no sci-fi plasma weapons here, just a dozen real-life triggers to pull) from very different aspects. The chase camera mode tails Max as he runs, guns blazing and leather jacket flapping, through trash-littered alleys and cockroach-infested motel rooms. Kind of a low-rent Lara Croft with stubble, in this respect. The cinematic camera provides 'director's cut' pre-determined views leading you into the dramatic set-pieces.

The game will be 3D hardware accelerated only (via D3D, and some native modes). 3D Realms is comparing the engine with that of Prey's up-coming cutting-edge technology, and it majors on smooth character animation with a wide range of possible moves, plus particle effects and clever use of dynamic light and shade.

Max Payne will have full multi-player support, with a variety of different game modes for LAN and Internet play.

There's only one catch. The developer has caught Id Software's habits and will only say it'll be done when it's done. But from what we've seen so far, Max looks like it's heading for a late 99 release.

THE PITCH: Lowlife action with a cinematic feel and a dark and gritty modern-day setting

THE PROSPECTS: Technologically looking very cool already. The plot sounds fun and Max himself is a real character. Max Payne could be *the* action adventure of '99

DUE: Autumn 99

ACTION

LANDER

LABEL: Psygnosis
DEVELOPER: In-house

First, Psygnosis' forthcoming Lander rolls back the years, drawing its inspiration from ancient Atari and C64 classics like Thrust and Lunar Lander. Then it sweeps you far into the future, to 3032AD – when the planets in the solar system are aligned in a unique sine curve. This is too good an opportunity to miss for the speculator, the mega-rich tourist, the corporate research divisions, or you, in your role as a freelance cargo hauler.

The gameplay in Lander will hang its hat squarely on the peg marked 'off-the-wall piloting'. Like those early games, inertia is everything and the lander is designed to be both awkward and immensely capable at the same time. Powered by vertical jets, you'll be tapping away on the mouse button in bunny hops or smooth bursts, while handling the craft's vertical and lateral pitch through mouse movement, and using keys to rotate. Now factor in different gravitational and atmospheric effects, plus the physics of carting heavy objects pendulum-like with a tractor beam. Then add people shooting at you…

Flying the lander will be a question of getting the knack, and then seeing what you can do when you develop a feel for rapid changes of altitude and direction – ricocheting around like a pinball and leaving conventional spacecraft in hysterics.

Technologically Lander is aiming for a real state of the art 3D setting, replete with fogging, reflective surfaces and other 3D hardware effects. Interestingly, what we first assumed to be a beta artefact is in fact deliberate: to avoid the chase camera being backed into a wall when manoeuvring in tight spaces and having to pan to a (usually unhelpful) side view, the camera position is maintained but intervening walls or objects are reduced to a wireframe. There will also be a DVD version of Lander, which will use the extra capacity to include multiple camera angles, broadcast quality MPEG2 video for cut-scenes and intros, and Dolby 5.1 digital Surround Sound.

THE PITCH: A favourite retro theme brought right up-to-date and majoring on the unique flying experience. Also likely to be the first true DVD game available

THE PROSPECTS: Long on technology, heavy on the classic influences – if the flying doesn't prove too frustrating a knack to master then Lander should come down in one very successful piece

DUE: February 99

TOP 10 NOW PLAYING

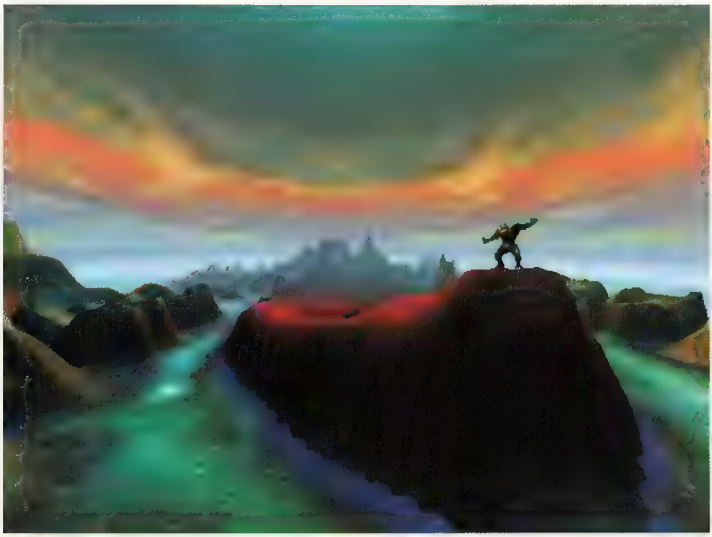
Here's what you're playing this month. Last month's position in parentheses.

Playlist position	Title	Label	Game Type
1	Age Of Empires	Microsoft	Strat/War
2	Grand Theft Auto	Take 2	Action
3	Quake II	Activision	Action
4	Total Annihilation	GT Interactive	Strat/War
5	Championship Manager 2 97/98	Eidos	Sports
6	C&C: Red Alert	Westwood	Strat/War
7	Age Of Empires: The Rise Of Rome	Microsoft	Strat/War
8	Commandos: Behind Enemy Lines	Eidos	Strat/War
9	Half-Life	Sierra	Action
10	Combat Flight Simulator	Microsoft	Simulation

STRATEGY & WARGAMING

GIANTS

LABEL: Interplay
DEVELOPER: Planet Moon



Giants is the name of a exciting game coming from the team originally responsible for MDK. We've certainly been much impressed by the innovative gameplay and unique graphics previewed at the E3 and ECTS development showcases.

Giants resists easy classification in any single game style. It is set on an exotic world hidden in the heart of a vast nebula. In this way, developer Planet Moon has an excuse to throw around some truly remarkable eye candy in the skyline alone. The three central races in the game battle for control of islands, each loosely equivalent to a level. The closest genre that can lay claim to Giants is real-time strategy. Giants could be described as resource management, yet with action and strategic gameplay weirdness all bound up with an amazing new 3D engine.

Those three races are made up of the Sea Reapers, the Meccaryn and the Giant Kabuto – the latter giving rise to the original name of the game, Citizen Kabuto. Officially the Sea Reapers, the Meccaryn and the Giant Kabuto are fighting for control of the world for different reasons. The Sea Reapers created Kabuto to defeat the Meccaryns but since he's decided he's an independent Giant in charge of his own destiny. Now he fights to control the island and to retain his freedom. The Sea Reapers, once the dominant race, have fled to the seas to retake their home from the invading Meccaryns and the great Kabuto. The Meccaryns are a space-faring race and are in dire need of a strategic place to complete repairs to their spaceship.

Creative designer Tim Williams puts a less strait-laced spin on the story: 'A race of magical and ethereal women, the Sea Reapers, live on a beautiful island at the furthest reaches of space. Many light-years away, five Cockney space aliens Baz, Tel, Reg, Gordon, and Bennett (otherwise known at the Meccaryns) leave their home planet for their annual "lads holiday" at the Planet Majorca.' Ahem, now look at the screenshots and imagine the Meccaryn saying, 'Cor blimey guv, that Giant geezer is 'aving a laugh, ini'?'

As if that's not surreal enough, Williams goes on, 'Almost immediately they are attacked and swallowed by the notorious Giant "Gibbon" Fish. Having given up their holiday for the ignominious distinction of being digested for two months, the five-some are finally "discharged" in their battered ship just within limping reach of the island.' Right… Let's leave that one shall we?

So how on earth did Planet Moon come up with the Giants concept? Williams says, 'During an MDK design session we started joking about an unlikely grouping of SpaceMen, Giants, Pirate all fighting each other. There was something in

GAMES TIMELINE

Waiting for that most important game? The PC Gaming World Timeline – adjusted

Entries picked out in Red are new on the PC Gaming World radar for this month

Entries picked out in Blue have changed release date this month

JAN '99

- Actua Soccer 3
- Dragonflight: Chronicles Of Pern
- Falcon 4.0
- Heavy Gear II
- Homeworld
- Jane's World Air Power IAF
- Myth II: Soulblighter
- PGA Tour Pro 3D
- Pro 18: World Tour Golf
- Return to Krondor
- Star Wars Rogue Squadron
- Wild Metal Country

FEB '99

- Alpha Centauri
- Brian Lara Cricket Championship Manager 3
- Diablo II
- Draken
- Duke Nukem Forever
- Interstate '82
- Lands of Lore III
- NASCAR 99
- Premier Manager 99
- Rollerball
- SimCity 3000
- Star Trek TNG: First Contact
- Starship Troopers
- Star Wars Force Commander
- Star Wars X-Wing Alliance
- TOCA Touring Car 2

MAR '99

- Age of Empires II: Age of Kings
- C&C 2: Tiberian Sun
- Close Combat III
- Daikatana
- Discworld Noir
- Driver
- Heroes Of Might & Magic III
- Indiana Jones & The Infernal Machine
- Jimmy Whites 2. Cueball
- MechWarrior III
- Omikron
- Outcast
- Prince Of Persia 3D
- SBK Superbike Championships
- Total Annihilation: Kingdoms
- Ultima Ascension

this mad idea that made sense to us all. It was later that we changed the pirates into the beautiful Sea Reapers. I think we were attracted to the diversity of gameplay that was inherent in these different groups – either that or we were probably all completely bladdered.'

Well, if that's what it takes to come up with something as new as Giants promises, we're left hoping more developers go out and get themselves thoroughly wrecked – strictly in the cause of their art, of course.

THE PITCH: Innovative gameplay with a gorgeous unique-looking 3D engine

THE PROSPECTS: The screenshots alone impress but the promise of great originality in the gameplay department has us thoroughly excited

DUE: April 99

monthly to take account of slippages – will tell you when to expect all the BIG releases

SPRING '99

Aironauts
Babylon 5: The Game
Braveheart
Constructor 2
Expert Pool
Gabriel Knight III
Godzilla
Gunship III
Hostile Waters
Lomu World Cup Rugby '99
Rally Championship 99
Resident Evil 2
Screamer Sports Car Racing
Soulbringer

APRIL

Anachronox
Black And White
Descent III
Excession: Out Of The Void
Giants
Metal Fatigue
SU-27 Flanker 2.0
The Revenant

MAY

Battlezone 2
Cutthroats

LATER 1999...

Blade
Conquest: Frontier Wars
Dungeon Keeper II
Earthworm Jim 3D
Elric
Flight Unlimited III
Formula 1 Grand Prix 3
Good & Evil
Knockout Kings
Loose Cannon
Max Payne
Messiah
Prince Naszim Boxing
Prey
Quake III: Arena
Sega Rally Championship 2
South Park. Deeply
Impacted
StarLancer
Star Trek: Secret Of Vulcan Fury
Star Trek: Starfleet Command
Urban Chaos
Warcraft 3
X-COM: Alliance

8 HOURS BEHIND

America is a another country. Strange stuff happens there. And some quite important stuff, too. To keep you in the loop – here's the view from 8 Hours Behind

All quoted from our US sister publication CGW.

Denny Atkin's Gaming Ups Of The Year

- Online services like Gamestorm adopting more realistic pricing ($10 per month is a killer deal for what it offers) but the future is with companies that offer free play and make their money out of selling boxed games
- Kudos to AMD for the K6-2 processor with 3DNow! technology which offers Pentium II-level performance for Socket 7 computers
- After spending a few months with the operating system I've been impressed with Windows 98's stability and ease of reinstallation

Denny Atkin's Gaming Downs Of The Year

- The great games that didn't sell in a market where utter crap has posted huge numbers. Battlezone and F22 ADF were prime examples. The first of which sold about on tenth the number of copies that drek like Deer Hunter sold
- 3D API confusion. The heated exchanges between the OpenGL and DirectX camps have petered out, but the fact remains that novice gamers are still faced with games supporting various combos of D3D, OpenGL and 3Dfx Glide
- The obligatory flame goes out to every company that released a game that needed patches to be good. How many gamers will never know that Rainbow Six, F/A-18 and M1 Tank Platoon II ended up being good gaming experiences. Finish the games *then* ship them

Jeff Green's Boneheads Of The Year

Apple Computer It takes Apple's perfected blend of arrogance, stupidity and flat-out delusional thinking to top itself, year after year. But, hey, you don't reduce yourselves to a sub-five per cent market share without a lot of effort! This year's Darwinian move was releasing the otherwise kinda cool iMac without a floppy drive. Next year try leaving out the monitor or hard drive too.

Jeff Green's Bummer of the Year

Blizzard's cancellation of WarCraft Adventures: Lord of the Clans... The cancellation of the WarCraft adventure game hit me hard. I actually plan on remaining in a permanent bad mood about it until WarCraft III comes out

Jeff Green's Worst Trend of the Year

Big-breasted gun-toting babes. You know, if we were talking about real big-breasted, gun-toting babes I might have called this the best trend of the year. But guys, Lara Croft and all these other computer chicks? They're not real. Please stop drooling over them now. It's pathetic. Let's all make a resolution right now to talk to some real girls in 1999.

TRANSATLANTIC TOP 10

Here's the latest PC games chart from the US – official US chart data from PC Data

	Title	Genre	Label
1	Deer Hunter II 3-D	Sports	Wizard Works
2	Cabela's Big Game Hunter 2	Sports	Activision
3	Fallout 2	Adv/RPG	Interplay
4	Diablo	Adv/RPG	Blizzard
5	Trespasser: Jurassic Park	Action	DreamWorks
6	Grim Fandango	Adv/RPG	LucasArts
7	Age Of Empires: The Rise of Rome	Strat/War	Microsoft
8	Combat Flight Simulator	Simulation	Microsoft
9	Barbie Riding Club	Strat/War	Mattel
10	Frogger	Classics/Puzzles	Hasbro Interactive

SIMULATIONS

BABYLON 5 SPACE COMBAT SIMULATOR

LABEL: Sierra FX
DEVELOPER: Yosemite Entertainment

Babylon 5 ushered in a new age of television science fiction, with state-of-the-art computer-generated special effects, plots based more on intrigue than on technobabble, unprecedented attention to detail and continuity, and storylines that often aren't what they seem on the surface. Those same characteristics make Babylon 5 Space Combat Simulator one of the most promising licensed games we've seen – especially as Babylon 5 producer J Michael Straczynski is guiding the game design.

Most of the game will be seen from the cockpit of a Starfury fighter. Babylon 5 is notable as one of the first sci-fi shows in which the spaceships don't fly like fighter jets. Fans knew they were in for a different kind of show when a Starfury pursued by an alien ship simply stopped thrusting, rotated on its axis, and fired head-on at the enemy, all without changing its flight path.

The same physics come into play here. We took a Starfury for a spin and found a flight model that will please Independence War and Wing Commander fans alike. In normal mode, your flight path is coupled to your control input, so giving the stick a hard left or right push will initiate a fighter-like turn. But a simple press of a joystick button uncouples the thrusters and allows you to spin your ship without altering its direction of flight. This is handy not only when a bad guy is on your tail, but also when attacking capital ships.

Thanks to the polygon-accurate collision modelling, you can make inertial strafing runs, get right up against the surface of the ships, or even pass through gaps and openings. You'll have to be careful not to be distracted by the majesty of some of the craft you're attacking, however. The development crew is employing the actual Lightwave 3D models used by Netter Digital to create special effects sequences for the series, and the results are spectacular. Even though the number of polygons must be reduced for real-time rendering – the original Minbari Cruiser has 45,000 polygons, while in the game it has closer to 1,500 – the ships still look great. High-quality texture maps make up for much of the loss of detail.

You can expect battles on an epic scale. The team has so far tested the engine with up to 350 ships fighting it out. Scalable detail will allow gamers who own a P200 with an original Voodoo card to see such battles while maintaining a decent frame rate.

The Babylon 5 universe is being modelled in full 3D, complete with a network of jump-gates to use to pass between systems. And, of course, the mysterious red, murky reaches of hyperspace will be modelled. You won't want to stray too far from jump-gate beacons when travelling

through hyperspace or you could get lost – or even worse, found.

The game universe is free-form. If you're given a mission to escort an Earth Force Omega-class destroyer, you're free to go off and attack the Drazi homeworld instead. But you will have to suffer the consequences. The non-linear, non-branching storyline promises replayability not usually seen in this genre.

The development team says the game's universe will have as many twists and turns as the series. In a genre plagued by linear, movielike campaigns with little replayability, that's a breath of fresh air.

THE PITCH: Space combat sim with all the appeal and individuality of the TV series

THE PROSPECTS: Detail and faithfulness to original should win fans

DUE: Spring 99

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Colin McRae Rally	£22.99	Heart Of Darkness	£26.99
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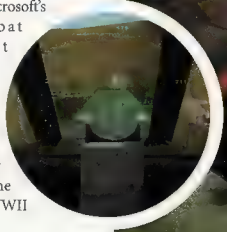
SIMULATION

FIGHTER SQUADRON: SCREAMIN' DEMONS OVER EUROPE

PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: Parsoft



With Microsoft's Combat Flight Simulator and MicroProse's European Air War out on sale and Jane's WWII Fighters well on its way, we're already half way through the current thrum of WWII flight simulations.

Fighter Squadron: The Screamin' Demons Over Europe will be next in line, and certainly qualifies for entry into the Ridiculously Long Game Names Club.

Fighter Squadron is, by its developer's own admission, a very arcade-oriented simulation. It's gone for realism as far as flight dynamics, aircraft recognition and weapon targeting are concerned, but you can bypass take-off and landing should you wish to, and long periods of time spent searching for enemy aircraft in the sky is made redundant by time compression and a dirty, cheating radar screen.

Fighter aircraft include the Messerschmitt Me262 jet and the Focke-Wulf FW190 on the German side and the Lockheed P38 Lightning and the North American P51 Mustang on the American. Thankfully there is a decent selection of British aircraft too. These include the De Havilland Mosquito, the Hawker Typhoon and the Supermarine Spitfire. There is one bomber for each nation: the Germans' JU88, the Americans' B17 and the good old Lancaster. Bombers are interesting in that you can man any post you like in them, from pilot to bombardier through all the gun positions. When you man a gun position the flying becomes automatic – though flying a bomber isn't the most exciting occupation anyway. The JU88 is especially weird with its entirely glass-paned cockpit.

The game features 30 missions, which can be played from the point of view of any of the three protagonists. Although these missions are not based on actual ones from the war, Activision claims that they have been constructed with history in mind and mimick real-life situations. All of the maps are 40x40 miles in size and you can fly freely around them, fuel permitting. A mission editor will also be built in.

Flight modelling is impressive and takes into account factors such as damage and payload. Thus manoeuvrability and performance are affected by whether bombs or drop tanks are being carried and whether you have a full tank of fuel. In real life, American B17 bomber crews always knew things were about to heat up over the Third Reich when they saw their 'little friends' (P51, P47 or P38 escorts) jettisoning their long range tanks – within minutes a dog fight would be in progress. Needless to say, damage also affects handling, though as long as you don't catch fire or lose a whole wing, an engine or a tail fin most planes will be able to struggle back home.

The 3D-enhanced graphics look good and damage is collected by planes in dramatic fashion. In-cockpit views are clear and all the instruments work as they should. Ground objects are destructible too, and most landmarks are easily recognisable. An unusual feature of the game is the AI settings you can assign to computer-controlled aircraft. These include Skill, Aggression, Morale, Loyalty and, of all things, Sanity.

Fighter Squadron: The Screamin' Demons Over Europe isn't just a pretty name – its jump-straight-to-battle facility should prove to be a considerable draw for the less pedantic simulation fans and its inclusion of the Typhoon, my favourite plane from childhood, is tantalising.

THE PITCH: Have some fun flying WWII combat aircraft

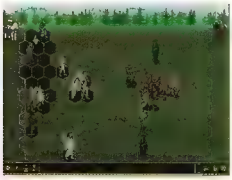
THE PROSPECTS: The skies over WWII Europe are pretty crowded at the moment but its accessibility will win it fans

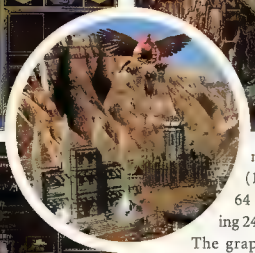
DUE: January 99

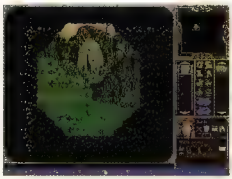
STRATEGY & WARGAMING

HEROES OF MIGHT & MAGIC III

LABEL: Ubi Soft
DEVELOPER: New World Computing







The Might & Magic series is one of the longest and most convoluted fantasy game families of all time. Wizardry and Ultima may beat it in a straight head-to-head numeric run (Might & Magic VI was the last game in the standard series), but New World Computing has an ace up its sleeve in the form of a Heroes derivative. The Heroes Of Might & Magic series is an offshoot of the original game, using the same basic world but moving away from the roleplaying game into a turn-based adventure-strategy world.

Heroes Of Might & Magic III follows the same structure as its predecessors: you can partake in a single large scenario or a selection of campaigns that give you more broken-up, mission-based objectives. The former involves taking over a complete territory, defeating other players, and engaging in warfare, magic and diplomacy. It's a hexagonal turn-based concept (though the hexes are hidden) where you begin with a town which you have to protect and fortify, and which you can upgrade to produce creatures to fight and take over other territories. All creatures that you produce have to be led out of the towns by a 'hero'. Heroes also pick up magic powers and artefacts which enhance their skills and the abilities of the folks under their protection. Littered round the landscape are resources, artefacts and goodies, all of which have to be fought for. And there's also a puzzle you can put together by visiting sacred sites.

For the already initiated, the main adventure map is 45 per cent bigger than the one in Heroes II and includes subterranean level maps, while the combat screens are 60 per cent bigger. There are 118 types of creature spread out over eight different types of town. The primary heroes associated with each town are Knights, Druids, Wizards, Heretics, Necromancers, Warlocks, Barbarians and Witches, while each town also has a secondary type of hero. There are also 60 per cent more artefacts (128 in total) and 64 spells – including 24 new ones.

The graphics are strikingly upgraded to beautiful 16-bit resolution and town interiors are most picturesque, but it's still like a fancy adaptation of a card-playing, table-top, roleplaying game. And why not? It's a formula that works beautifully.

THE PITCH: The classic turn-based fantasy strategy game, with more missions, adventures and creatures, and more exceptionally beautiful backdrops

THE PROSPECTS: For genre fans this is likely to be the cream of the crop. Not a lot of innovation, but plenty more of the stuff we all adore

DUE: January

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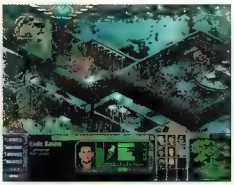
ACTION

ENEMY INFESTATION

LABEL: Funsoft
DEVELOPER: Melbourne House



The year is sometime in the mid-24th Century and Earth has once again been ravaged by the usual assortment of natural and self-inflicted disasters. Our last hope lies out in the depths of space on the planet Redavi, a new Eden whose vast resources and fertile oceans now feed mankind's hungry millions. But a chance encounter with a seemingly innocuous meteorite burning through the night sky, suddenly introduces a new and wholly unwelcome set of alien visitors to Redavi and the fight is on to protect this most vital colony.

This is Enemy Infestation, Ripcord's real-time sci-fi strategy game which bears more than a passing resemblance to the Alien films and even has echoes of MicroProse's X-COM series. Taking command of Redavi's colonist forces, you'll find a diverse assortment of personnel stranded on the planet each with a unique set of skills and specialist knowledge to help you beat the alien menace. Military characters provide your raw muscle, while scientists can research weapons or adapt technology and even the rather comical maintenance robots can be pressed into service.

The action takes place across five huge, intricately detailed environments and the pleasing isometric views and sinister artwork provide an elaborate, moody sci-fi atmosphere. The early missions we looked at required a fair degree of strategic thinking and the full version will contain 26 one- or two-player scenarios to conquer. Ripcord is also promoting the multiplayer element heavily and Enemy Infestation will come LAN, modem and Internet ready, with up to four players co-operating on the 10 missions specifically designed for the task. Enemy Infestation already looks a very promising title and if the developers can make the mission structure sufficiently challenging and clean up the slightly twitchy combat system, then sci-fi strategy fans could be in for a treat.

THE PITCH: Atmospheric highly playable Alien-inspired strategy

THE PROSPECTS: With a convincing mission structure and improved combat system this would be a winner

DUE: January 99

CHARTS

The PC Gaming World Charts are compiled from official weekly sales data gathered by ChartTrack/ELSPA

TOP 30 PC GAMES

This week	Last month	Title	Publisher	Weeks on chart	Highest position
1	NE	Tomb Raider III	Eidos	1	1
2	NE	Half-Life	Sierra	1	2
3	NE	Combat Flight Simulator	Microsoft	3	1
4	NE	Populous - The Beginning	Bullfrog	2	3
5	NE	Settlers III	Blue Byte	2	4
6	(1)	FA Premier League Football Manager 98	EA Sports	7	1
7	(4)	Colin McRae Rally	Codemasters	8	1
8	(3)	Titanic - Adventure Out Of Time	Europress	25	3
9	NE	Age Of Empires: The Rise Of Rome	Microsoft	3	2
10	(13)	World Cup 98	EA Sports	27	1
11	(7)	Age Of Empires	Microsoft	58	2
12	NE	Grim Fandango	LucasArts	4	1
13	RE	Flight Simulator '98	Microsoft	59	1
14	(11)	Grand Theft Auto	Take 2	51	2
15	(6)	Commandos: Behind Enemy Lines	Eidos	23	1
16	NE	Carmageddon II: Carpocalypse Now	SCi	4	2
17	NE	European Air War	MicroProse	3	10
18	(2)	Caesar III	Sierra	6	2
19	NE	Railroad Tycoon II	Take 2	4	5
20	(8)	Premier Manager 98	Gremlin	21	2
21	NE	SiN	Activision	3	4
22	RE	Monopoly	Hasbro	86	10
23	(5)	Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Red Storm		7	3
24	(15)	Tomb Raider II	Eidos	51	1
25	(14)	Championship Manager 2 97/98	Eidos	55	1
26	NE	Lego Loco	Lego Media	2	23
27	NE	Fallout 2	Interplay	1	27
28	(18)	Civilization II	MicroProse	128	1
29	NE	Play With The Teletubbies	BBC Multimedia	3	23
30	(21)	Small Soldiers: Squad Commander	Hasbro	5	21

NE - New Entry. RE - Re Entry

BUDGET/RE-RELEASES TOP 15

1	Tomb Raider / Unfinished Business	Premier Collection
2	Worms	Sold Out
3	Network Q RAC Rally Championship	Q Range
4	Theme Park	EA Classics
5	Theme Hospital	EA Classics
6	The Full Wormage	MicroProse
7	Total Annihilation	Replay
8	Duke Nukem 3D	Premier Collection
9	Championship Manager 2 96/97	Premier Collection
10	Earthworm Jim	Essential Collection
11	Cannon Fodder 2	Sold Out
12	Oddworld: Abe's Oddysee	Replay
13	Settlers II: Veni, Vidi, Vici	Blue Byte Classics
14	Cannon Fodder	Sold Out
15	Worms United	Power Plus

SIMULATIONS TOP 3

1	Combat Flight Simulator	Microsoft
2	Colin McRae Rally	Codemasters
3	Flight Simulator 98	Microsoft

ACTION TOP 3

1	Tomb Raider III	Eidos
2	Half-Life	Sierra
3	Grand Theft Auto	Take 2

STRATEGY & WARGAMING TOP 3

1	Populous: The Beginning	Bullfrog
2	Settlers III	Blue Byte
3	Age Of Empires: The Rise Of Rome	

SPORTS TOP 3

1	FA Premier League Football Manager 99	EA Sports
2	Premier Manager 98	Gremlin
3	Championship Manager 97/98	Eidos

ADVENTURE & ROLEPLAYING TOP 3

1	Titanic - Adventure Out Of Time	Europress
2	Grim Fandango	LucasArts
3	Fallout 2	Interplay

MULTIMEDIA TOP 3

1	South Park Theme & Screensaver	Telstar Electronic Studios
2	The Simpsons: Virtual Springfield	Fox Interactive
3	Lego Creator	Lego Media

SPORTS

PUMA STREET SOCCER

LABEL: Sunsoft
DEVELOPER: Pixelstorm

Puma Street Soccer from Pixelstorm aims to reclaim some of soccer's street cachet by taking it out of the stadium and putting it back on the streets, where most players first learn their trade. What transpires is an arcade-inspired five-a-side marathon which takes place in a series of diverse locations, spread across a number of streetwise sites such as parks, sea ports and airports, plus a number of hidden venues which are steadily revealed as your soccer skills progress.

From the off, Puma sets out its stall to be a purely playable soccer experience like ISS on the Nintendo 64. And it incorporates a number of arcade elements like acrobatic special moves, scissor kicks and even a super shot – a power strike that can literally burn its way through the keeper's hands. In the version we looked at, the graphics were good, if not quite FIFA 99 standard, and certainly fast, which contributed to the entertaining, frenetic, console-style gameplay.

In the full version you'll also be able to play alongside Puma stars of world football like Deschamps Pagliuca and Mijatovic, and Street Soccer will also support up to eight players, so the prospects for multi-play are healthy.

Taking on the big boys of world soccer like FIFA and Actua is a truly awesome task, but with Puma's fresh, streetwise approach and engaging gameplay, it could just win itself a dedicated following down at the fast, but furious end of the pitch.

THE PITCH: Pure, pacy, console-style soccer for your PC

THE PROSPECTS: There's a wealth of talent already out there, but Puma will be more arcade action oriented than FIFA or Actua

DUE: March 1999

LET'S GET H

CONQUEST:

Digital Anvil isn't wholly preoccupied with the Wing Commander movie – it's forging a chain of ambitious games ready for release over the next year

Pride of place in the lobby of Digital Anvil's Austin, Texas, offices, alongside Kilrathi suits and other movie and game memorabilia, is a small, framed email. Although not quite a 'Dear Bill' letter, it's not far from it. It started the ball rolling for the multi-title, multi-million-dollar publishing deal between Microsoft and Digital Anvil, the games (and movie) company founded by ex-Origin legend, Chris Roberts in 1996.

It was hardly surprising that Microsoft was keen to snap it up, given the talent on offer. Chris was having number one hits in the UK as early as 1987, and went on to create the epic Wing Commander (I-IV) series, as well as the very much ahead of its time Strike Commander. His brother Erin designed and scripted the AI for enemy pilots in the original Wing Commander, was associate producer on Strike Commander, producer on Privateer and went on to produce and direct the remarkable Privateer II: The Darkening. Tony Zurovec takes credit for both Crusader: No Remorse and Crusader: No Regret, as well the lead programming title on Ultima VIII. They're all part of the Digital Anvil team, along with industry veterans like Jeff Heath and Martyn Davies.

But since that email and the original furore surrounding the announcement of the publishing deal, not a peep has been heard from the Digital Anvil offices, apart from the odd, terse press release concerning the forthcoming Wing Commander movie. A film, by the way, which Chris Roberts is directing and for which Digital Anvil is creating all the special effects.

Now, finally, Digital Anvil is happy to talk about three major titles destined for a 1999 release: driving adventure Loose Cannon (Tony Zurovec); galactic domination, real-time style in Conquest: Frontier Wars (Erin Roberts), and frantic space combat in Starlancer (also Erin Roberts). But there's one title it's still very shy about. Chris Roberts' pet project – a monstrously ambitious multiplayer space exploration and trading game due out some time in the year 2000. It's called Freelancer, but you didn't hear any of this from me, OK?

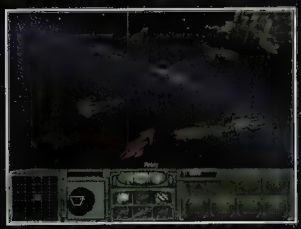
Digital Anvil's Conquest team

www.microsoft.com/games/da/
www.digitalanvil.com

The first of this trio from Digital Anvil, Conquest, should hit the shelves in August 1999. It's a fully 3D, real-time space strategy game set some 200 years in the future. Mankind is in the merry process of exploiting and converting, sorry, exploring and colonising the galaxy, when suddenly an alien race appears with identical intentions and a phobia for discussing things like civilised multi-appendaged beings. Compromise? Nah.

The scene is thus set for a game of exploration, colonisation and intergalactic warfare, with the player taking the part of either the Terran or Mantis forces.

The emphasis is on large-scale fleet engagements as players seek to exploit native and foreign planets for resources and wealth, and to develop new technologies. Battles are fought over and round the various planets and star systems, as you try to establish mining and manufacturing stations, and – most



2D drag 'n' select in a 3D world? Yes, it works

AMMERED!

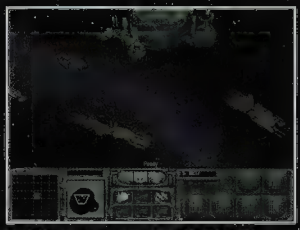
FRONTIER WARS

Publisher: Microsoft
Developer: Digital Anvil
Due: August 1999

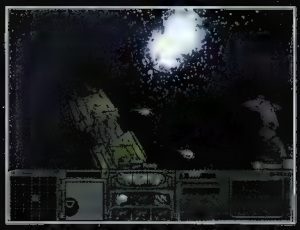
importantly – maintain your lines of supply.

Both races have radically different strengths and weaknesses in their armouries (which include stasis weapons, cloaking warships, mammoth battleships with squadrons of defensive fighters, and layers of mines), and Erin Roberts describes this as bringing a rock/paper/scissors element to the joys of fleet-to-fleet engagements. To add a real tactical twist to the scenario, the game takes place across 16 linked quadrants – each accessed via specific jump gates that can be created, defended or destroyed.

Digital Anvil is quick to point out the difference in style and scope from Sierra's Homeworld, another forthcoming 3D real-time space strategy title. Conquest has bigger fleets, bigger ships, bigger planets and a more complex resource and supply model. But hey, this is Texas – everything is bigger. Silly me.

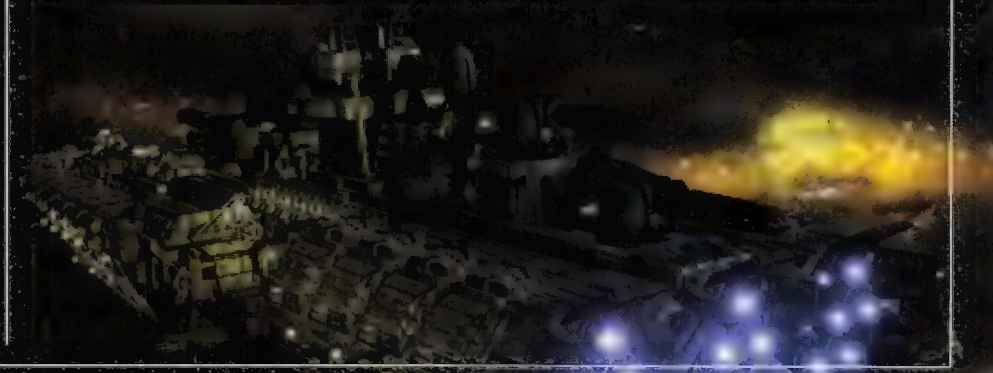


Exploit resources, research and build, build...



... only to have those aliens undo all your work

Visually it's rather impressive, particularly as you watch the texture-mapped particle explosions and the polygon-based craft (we're talking very high polygon counts, too, so the detail is first rate) manoeuvring round hazy planetoids and disappearing into nebulae. In fact, getting the craft to manoeuvre properly has been one of the biggest headaches in the development process (although compared with the pathing headaches you get in an urban



CONQUEST: FRONTIER WARS

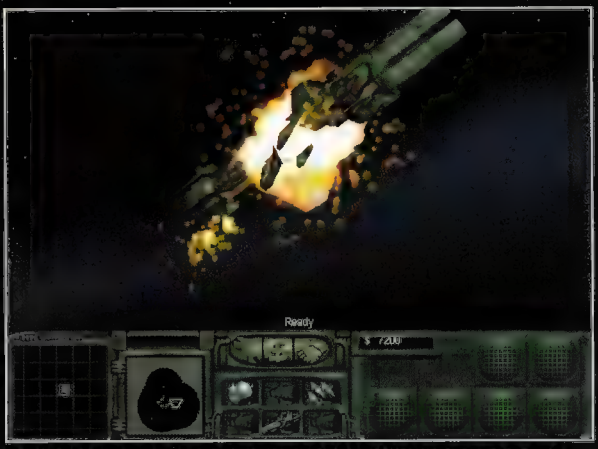
real-time strategy environment, Digital Anvil is probably still counting its blessings). What it does mean is that you can use hide-and-seek tactics round planets, nebulae, black holes and so forth.

Every time I've mentioned the game back at *PC Gaming World*, the response has been 'Ah, a bit like StarCraft then?' No. It's nothing like StarCraft, least of all visually. Its three-dimensionality gives it an entirely different look and feel.

The interface is also shaping up remarkably well. A third dimension – particularly without a horizon for reference – might have made selecting and directing craft more difficult. But Digital Anvil has stuck with a 2D point-and-click plane to handle the action, despite the fact that it's taking place along three axes (the Z axis is kept noticeably smaller than the X/Y axes), and it seems to work effectively.

As well as drag-selecting ships, you can easily tag fleets and bring them to the point of action without having to scroll the galaxy in search of them, and you can give sequential, waypoint-style orders.

Nor will you be alone in trying to bring your troops to order. Conquest allows you to allocate admirals to fleets – mini-commanders who autonomously defend, attack or raid enemy star systems, as well as keeping you posted on the state of the war. Moreover, these admirals learn and improve with experience (assuming they survive) and are thus able to handle larger fleets and use more advanced tactics.



Particle effect explosions and huge polygon counts? Is this a real-time strategy game or a sim?

The Digital Anvil team describe themselves as 'rabid real-time strategy players', and with its fluid 3D battles, and tactical demands like the quadrants and jump gates, Conquest is a natural for multiplayer gaming. It will support up to eight players over the Internet or on a LAN, as well as head-to head modem games. You also get an extra two races to choose from and multiplayer-specific scenarios. From a multiplayer perspective, it's one of the most promising real-time prospects for 1999.

As a single-player game it's almost impossible to place it on the gobsmackingly brilliant through to utter rubbish scale at this stage. It has all the right ingredients for now, though: clever technology, clearly defined combat and resource elements, an intuitive interface, and an original and frankly rather delightful look.

FREELANCER

Publisher: Microsoft
Developer: Digital Anvil
Due: Early 2000

TOP SECRET!

Shssh! We're not supposed to be talking about this one. Digital Anvil has a fourth title that's pencilled in for an early 2000 launch. Freelancer is to be an epic game of space exploration, trade and combat. A cross between Elite and Privateer 2, only bigger – and it's all Chris Roberts' baby.

The setting will be a little like Dune in its blend of technology, nostalgia and aristocratic politicking, and the game will offer a consistent look throughout – whether piloting a ship in combat, landing on a planet or wandering round a spaceport bar.

The Freelancer galaxy will be a series of concentric circles with an over-riding set of rules rather than a scripted environment. Missions will be generated by a cause and effect-driven echo system throughout the game universe, with this system driving players out to fresh encounters in both single and multiplayer games. At its most basic it could work something like this: piracy in system A closes off trade route to system B who call upon system C to intervene. In a multiplayer game, this could be player-initiated and fellow player responding, or the computer AI taking either part in single or multiplayer games.

Technologically, Roberts claims, 'it'll be beyond anything out there.' Freelancer will feature full 3D with detailed facial motion capture throughout, plus massive and immensely detailed ships (Roberts is talking about 10,000 faces – polygons – per ship). The interface will also be completely mouse driven. Spaceships will have component parts with relevant functions, thus bringing a more strategic element to combat than the usual high-speed turning battle. It's not going to be a matter of just hitting, it's *where* you hit that will count. To help the player

STARLANCER

Publisher: Microsoft
Developer: Digital Anvil
Due: Christmas 1999

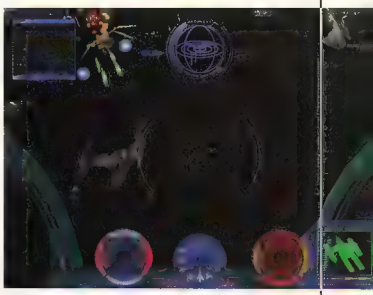
Sticking with the 'Space is big' theme we move on to the second Digital Anvil title – Starlancer, a first-person, space combat simulation. Only Space isn't quite so big this time, because in Starlancer the action takes place entirely within Earth's solar system. Superpowers, such as the US, China, Russia and, er, Great Britain, vie for territory on an assortment of planets including Earth and Mars

It's up to you, as part of the 45th Volunteer Squadron (the charity-division of the interplanetary fleet) to get out there, bag some bad guys and generally secure some more territory from your 3D walkaround base on board the obsolete carrier Reliant.

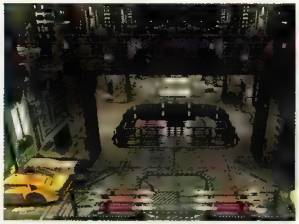
Starlancer is straightforward action and the ships you fly and the scenes you see between combat sequences will seem more familiar to fans of Wing Commander than Privateer 2. It reminds me a bit of Starship Troopers with wings – all very gung-ho in a tongue-in-cheek kind of way. The Roberts brothers prefer to make the parallel with Pearl Harbour and other melodramatic WWII aviation scenarios. And who am I to argue?

Once you're into the action, there will be 12 different ships to choose from with over 20 ridiculous weapons of interplanetary destruction and a total of over 80 ship types in all. The variety of non-linear missions will feature anything from small-scale dog-fights, to escort duties, alongside mammoth battlecruisers. The degree of success or failure in these missions will determine the overall success of your unit, and the AI of the opposing pilots is designed both to respond to your tactics and to demonstrate their differing skill levels. Interestingly, the ships will use a variation on the sort of 'damage box' hit areas you'd expect to see in a WWII or jet combat flight simulation. So, there should be a lot more to the action than the stock 'keep turning and blasting till his shields are gone' affair.

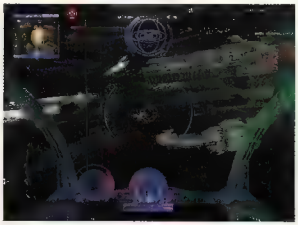
Starlancer is aggressive and bright – the larger ships in particular are gloriously over the top. I'm not convinced about the name of the game (which makes me think of side scrolling coin-ops or a celebrity pile doctor), but for a one-off space combat project, with the emphasis on intense action and a strong storyline, you couldn't ask for a more experienced team.



Space combat sans compromise in Starlancer



The Reliant may be a heap, but it's your heap



Chaos reigns in mammoth fleet engagements

fly and fight in this manner, there will be a neural net AI acting as co-pilot. And yes, you guessed it, the AI improves with your success and experience, and you get to take it with you.

The visuals, based on only a quick peek, will be heavily stylised and moody. Imagine Westwood's Bladerunner, but modelled in 3D throughout and drawing on the talents of veteran 2000AD artist Carlos Ezquerra, among others.

What Roberts *really* wanted to do with Freelancer was make a persistent space opera for thousands of players – a sort of cosmic Ultima Online. Forget Wing Commander: The Movie. Meet Wing Commander: The Universe.

So what stopped him? According to Roberts, '3,000 people in a persistent universe was my original goal. I was looking at peer-to-peer connections using eight-player segments. But peer-to-peer isn't fast enough as it stands. To make it work the game has to be server-based and I'm just not interested in that UO [Ultima Online] model. That's just a maintenance issue, just problems. I don't think its making them any money, either.'

But that doesn't mean that the game won't be doing its bit for the massively multiplayer universe – far from it. Freelancer is being modified to support a Quake-style client-server model. So, if you want to run an ongoing game server for up to *one hundred* intrepid spacers, you'll get your chance. Digital Anvil will seed a few servers, but otherwise it will be up to individuals to run their universe games as they see fit. Whoever runs the server will decide on the style of game – be it fixed limit with no character save or AI upload, or a full-blown drop-in, drop-out ongoing affair. There will certainly be a rudimentary level editor available, too. You'll also be able to customise your character.

Freelancer is a massively ambitious project. Now show us some code and give us some pictures, dammit!

LOOSE CANNON

Publisher: Microsoft
Developer: Digital Anvil
Due: September 1999

Digital Anvil's third project, Loose Cannon, is an adventure-cum-driving game brimming with attitude and a fascination with cars, guns, and large-scale acts of violence.

Set in a lawless 21st century US – post petroleum-wars – Loose Cannon has the player take the role of bounty hunter Ashe. Among his many problems, Ashe is attempting to put the leader of a major criminal syndicate (Bishop), and his associates out of action.

Tony Zurovec admits to being heavily influenced by vehicle combat games of the 80s like Car Wars and Autoduel. In this instance, though, the player has to make the choice of when to go on foot or to use one of the 15 customisable vehicles.

Loose Cannon is heavily story-driven. There are over 20 mandatory missions, numerous semi-scripted missions, as well as unscripted and random optional tasks. Played across nine cities and 12 countryside areas, it could be a case of rescuing hostages from a building, conducting an assassination, or orchestrating a run-in with one of the many 'pockets of crime'. The player has to decide which to take, when, and whether to go in on four wheels or two feet.

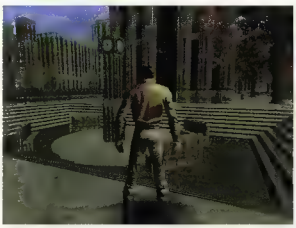
The cars are destructible, so you'll see deformations of the mesh and distinct handling changes due to damage and terrain. So far, the car-based weaponry in Loose Cannon is mostly familiar stuff – rocket launchers, flamers, machine guns and so on. While on foot you get even more weapons to play with, plus a fair bit of sneaking around to do.

The in-car action should be keep action gamers in hog heaven, but the real show-stealers are the realistic cityscapes. The buildings don't just feel like boxes with repeating textures, they feel 'right', they feel detailed, and – as you handbrake it across three lanes of a freeway – thoroughly lived in. A simply stunning environment.

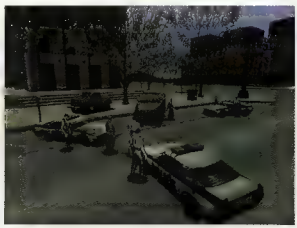
The heavily plotted nature of the single player game doesn't – as Zurovec is happy to point out – really lend itself to a straight multiplayer translation. Instead it will be as separate deathmatch arenas, for one to eight players.

Single or multiplayer, Loose Cannon is not shy on the violence front – with burning characters, hit-and-run driving and the gratuitous use of heavy ordinance in built-up areas. Apparently both Digital Anvil and Microsoft are happy with this, at least where the violence is inherent to the mission structure and storyline. However they are trying to tailor the gameplay to discourage acts of violence upon innocent bystanders. According to Zurovec: 'We can't get rid of the possibility of incidental or random violence without locking everything away. But that type of gameplay is explicitly discouraged by the way the game is set up.' In other words, trashing of pedestrians puts the cops on your tail.

Loose Cannon was the unexpected hit of Digital Anvil pack. It promises great attitude and style, lots of cool hardware and a complex storyline which seems to generate tough missions at the drop of a stetson. All that, and one of the most impressive urban driving environments you'll encounter.

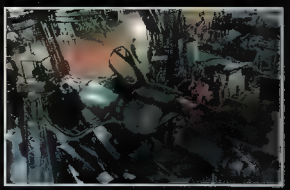


Ashe was shocked at what they did to Big Ben



Like this roadblock is gonna work? Not a chance

WING COMMANDER: THE MOVIE



The $25 million Wing Commander movie is due out next spring. Directed by Chris Roberts, it's based on the first four games and follows the exploits of pilot Christopher Blair, fresh from the academy. Carrying a message about a Kilrathi invasion, Blair plus comrades Maniac (Matthew Lillard, *Scream*) and Deveraux (Saffron Burrows, *Circle of Friends*) join the Confederate forces to fight the invaders.

PCGW: So, the WC series makes for a good film?

Chris Roberts: Not every book makes a great film. It's the same with games. Wing Commander lends itself because its original influences were very cinematic. I'm still more nervous about its reception than any game I've ever made.

PCGW: Space opera or high-tech war film?

Roberts: More of a gritty, WWII film in space. A sci-fi *Das Boot*.

PCGW: How are you finding the crossover?

Roberts: You need a lot of insane confidence... I'd directed live action for Wing III and IV. In some ways PC development is tougher than film because you're always trying to work with unproven technology. Something games development also teaches you that film school can't, is the multitasking to cope with a project of this size. Plus there's the technology. If I ask a Hollywood effects team if they can do a sequence, of course they're going to say yes. But they're not going to say how long it will take, cost or how good it will look. We are doing all the effects, we know what can be done and what it will cost us.

PCGW: Any time left to work on games then?

Roberts: Some, but not as much as I used to. In the past, my involvement has sometimes been a bottleneck. Everyone else would be waiting on me to finish code, but I'd be in a meeting, filming or doing company stuff. It taught me a lot. On Freelancer I've got myself down to do some of effects and I'm heavily into the game design. I'm not part of the main programming effort.

Elvis Bacon

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DANK & SCUD

More impressionable fans of Quake will not be helped back to reality by a comic strip that sees its characters take on a life of their own – and even pay a sociable visit to their Half-Life counterparts…

When Michael Houston put issue six of his Dank & Scud comic strip on the Net, 100,000 visitors stormed in to read it during the first day. The remarkable thing about this is that the comic strip is set in the virtual gaming universe and that the characters Dank & Scud are themselves Quake personas. The 27-year-old Canadian Web developer has successfully blended humour with the well-known universe of the first-person shooter genre and, as a result, has a loyal following of fans.

Dank & Scud began as a simple Windows background that Michael created just to practise his Photoshop techniques. When he wanted to brush up on his HTML, he turned that bitmap into a three-page comic. Once on the Web, Dank & Scud became a hit among the growing Quake community and now, six issues later, Dank & Scud enter the Half-Life universe.

Houston tells how he brings Dank & Scud to life: 'I first create a pseudo-storyboard on paper, complete with rough

Bringing a touch of Marvel to first-person shooters, Dank & Scud's adventures continue in true comic strip style: they look nice, they sound cool, they get plenty of opportunities to vanquish foes and, just as Spiderman probably met the Incredible Hulk, they casually drop in on a somewhat harassed Gordon Freeman.

sketches and panel layouts. Paper is still the best way to throw ideas around. Once the initial comic layout is made, I hunt through the Quake levels looking for an appropriate area to use as a set for a scene. Once I've found one, I take several screenshots of the area (with F12), at a high resolution (800x600). Using this resolution gives me the freedom to shrink the image to the required panel size without losing much quality. I can remove most of the eyesores such as medi-kits and the like by typing "r_drawentities 0" at the console. To remove the weapon-wielding hand at the bottom of the screen I change the field of view to 89 (~fov 89).

'The next step is to put the characters into the picture. To do this I use three separate programs. First, the Quake Model Editor lets me view each of the character's poses from any view. Once I find the perfect pose, I screen-capture the character using Paint Shop Pro. From this, I can cut and paste it into Adobe Photoshop. The hardest part of the process is trying to match the character's size with the set, since I have no accurate way of determining what size they should be. Photoshop also allows me to add each character into the panel as a separate layer, which makes it much easier to modify individual parts of the panel without screwing up the rest.'

All six episodes of Dank & Scud can be found on this month's cover CD. Since we like the comic duo so much we'll also make sure any future episodes are included!

Mat Bettinson

Dank & Scud live at http://www.quakecomics.qc.ca

MAX IT OUT

So, the bloke with the big beard and the chimney fetish has been good to you this year. You're now the owner of a spanking new PC with the words 'Ultimate Games System' slapped all over the packaging. Life is pretty near perfect.

Actually, there's still work to be done. It's an unfortunate rule of thumb that most PC vendors wouldn't know a game system if it stood up and offered to go twelve rounds with Tyson. So, let's roll up our sleeves, dig out the gaffer tape and do some tinkering – that new system needs to be properly optimised for serious games playing

CLEAN AND TUNE

Let's skip all that ergonomics blah about how to set up your PC – we can assume you know how long you'll be sitting in front of it. Let's get straight onto essential housekeeping.

Start by removing all non-essential applications from the Start Up folder (Start/Settings/Taskbar/Advanced). You aren't deleting the apps themselves, just the shortcut that fires them up when Windows loads. Particular offenders include Find Fast and Office Fast Start, as well as the Win98 task scheduler and any display card applets.

Large wallpaper files chew up memory

Now get rid of any other unnecessary crap – big bitmap wallpapers and wacky sound files chew up memory. Similarly, turn off Window dragging and menu animations (Display Properties/Effects).

Next, you need to get online and sort out your drivers. It is absolutely essential that you have an up-to-date version of DirectX. Not only will an old version run games slower, it will also not run some at all. The latest version, DirectX 6, is on our free CD or you can get the file DX6core.exe from www.microsoft.com.

You can safely bet that some peripherals inside your brand new system are *not* using the latest drivers. Hit the appropriate Web sites for the latest versions, as well as the chip manufacturer for reference drivers, which may be superior. We've seen differences of 15 to 20 per cent in performance between two sets of drivers, so it pays to be aware of updates. Be wary of beta drivers, though – be sure to back up your originals.

THIS IS HARDCORE

Tinkering with the BIOS or overclocking the processor are not things we happily recommend. But, if you feel like living dangerously there are some things to consider. Many new BIOSes have preset options for 'performance' and 'stability'. Simply select performance, save and see if things run properly. If not, reset. Taking this one step further, go through the system features changing anything with a slow/fast or low/med/high setting to Fast and High. Reboot and cross your fingers.

Overclocking the processor needs to be done with care and a lot of research. It is possible to overclock some types of processor – our 333MHz CeleronA runs fine at 416MHz and will do 500MHz for a couple of hours before keeling over. However whether it can be done at all will vary from chip to chip, and a lot depends on what your motherboard will allow you to do. You need a good understanding of core voltages, bus multipliers and clock speeds. And, a degree of insane confidence...

WILL I HAVE TO SPEND MORE?

As time goes by, certainly. For now, probably. The system builder may have short-changed one of the system components (they're like that), which could drastically affect overall games performance.

If you have less than 64Mb of RAM you need to get it topped up pronto. You also need to check out which 3D adaptor(s) you have since this is a notorious short-cut and an obsolete 3D chip will be a huge bottleneck.

Watch out for old ATI 2D/3D cards using the Rage and Rage Pro chipsets – they're under-powered and out of the mainstream in the way they support 3D games. Chuck anything with the words 'S3 Virge' on it in the bin. Banshee and TNT-based 2D/3D cards are a good option at around £100, or if your 2D is satisfactory you could opt for a Voodoo II 3D card at the same price.

Got a Winmodem (that's a generic type of modem, not a brand)? Get rid of it, it's useless for online gaming. Get a real modem, not one that expects the CPU to do all its hard work.

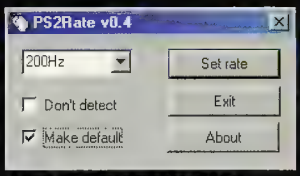
Bundled games controllers are usually pretty Christmas cracker, too. Whether you need to bin them and buy something decent will depend on your preferred gaming genre(s). If you like driving games, you'll need a decent steering wheel and pedals. For flight sims you'll need a programmable flight stick. And so on.

Your existing sound card and speakers may or may not support 3D surround sound. Since there are excellent cards like the Diamond Sonic Impact for a mere £40 (with 3D sound support) it may be worth considering an immediate upgrade.

● Take a look at the Killer Rigs listing on page 125 for our recommendations on every aspect of PC hardware

Now it's time to do some tuning up. Run the disk defragmentation utility (Start/Programs/Accessories/System Tools) for the first time with all options checked. Go and make a cup of tea. When that's done, hold down Alt and double-click on My Computer to bring up the System Properties dialogue, and click on the Performance tab. Select Virtual Memory and chose the option to specify your own memory settings. As a general rule, go for twice the amount of physical memory you have (so for a PC with 64Mb Ram, set this to Minimum 128Mb, Maximum 128Mb. Restart now. On restart, Windows will grab a clean and pretty much contiguous amount of drive space and reserve it for your swap file.

Still on the Performance tab, select File System and set it for full read-ahead optimisation and set the computer's typical role as Network Server (not desktop). This will speed up your hard drive access.



Enhance your PS/2 mouse with PS/2 Rate

You may also want to create a new drive partition solely for your games using a utility like Partition Magic. Once installed, a game writes little to a drive (apart from small save files) so reserving a partition for games and keeping it free from general document use will speed things up a bit. It's also tidier, too.

Finally, if you have a PS/2 mouse, download a copy of PS/2 Rate, install it and set the rate to 100Hz. This will improve the smoothness and precision with which your mouse scrolls across the screen. Can't be beat.

Elvis Bacon

ESSENTIAL NAMES TO DROP - THE CLASSIC GAMES TO GIVE YOUR COLLECTION SOME CREDIBILITY

- Alone In The Dark (Infogrames)
- Civilization (Sid Meier)
- Doom (Carmack, Romero and co...)
- Dune II (Westwood)
- Elite (David Braben)
- Midwinter (Mike Singleton)
- Populous (Peter Molyneux)
- Prince Of Persia (Jordan Mechner)
- SimCity 2000 (Will Wright)
- The Secret Of Monkey Island (Ron Gilbert)
- Wing Commander (Chris Roberts)
- Any of the classic Infocom adventures – Zork, Leather Goddesses of Phobos, Hitch-Hiker's Guide and so on...

ESSENTIAL UTILITIES TO DOWNLOAD

PS/2rate A utility for upping the sampling rate of a PS/2 mouse.

Pkzip/Winzip Long standing favourite for file compression

Paintshop Pro Shareware graphics application. Generally useful, edit Quake skins here

Gamespy Devastatingly good online game launcher

Q2tweak.zip 3Finger's excellent Quake document includes good advice on setting up for online gaming

Mirabilis ICQ Online chat program. Fast, free and very flexible

Hypersnap DX the only sure way to grab screen-shots of your favourite moments

DX6core.exe Latest version of DirectX 6

3D GameGauge Suite of 3D games performance benchmarks

ESSENTIAL WEB SITES TO BOOKMARK

www.voodoextreme.com/3Fingers Great optimisation site, particularly 3D acceleration

www.gamespot.co.uk Up-to-the-hour gaming news, our site .

www.bluesnews.com 3D Games news

www.tomshardware.com Used to be the definitive overclocking and motherboard site. A bit second-rate these days

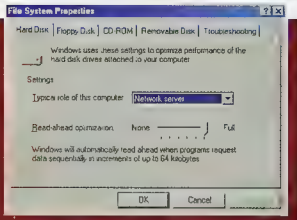
www.sharkyextreme.com Takes a hardware spin on 3D gaming

www.winfiles.com Essential shareware. Comprehensive

www.windrivers.com Massive library of driver files

SOME DO'S AND DON'TS

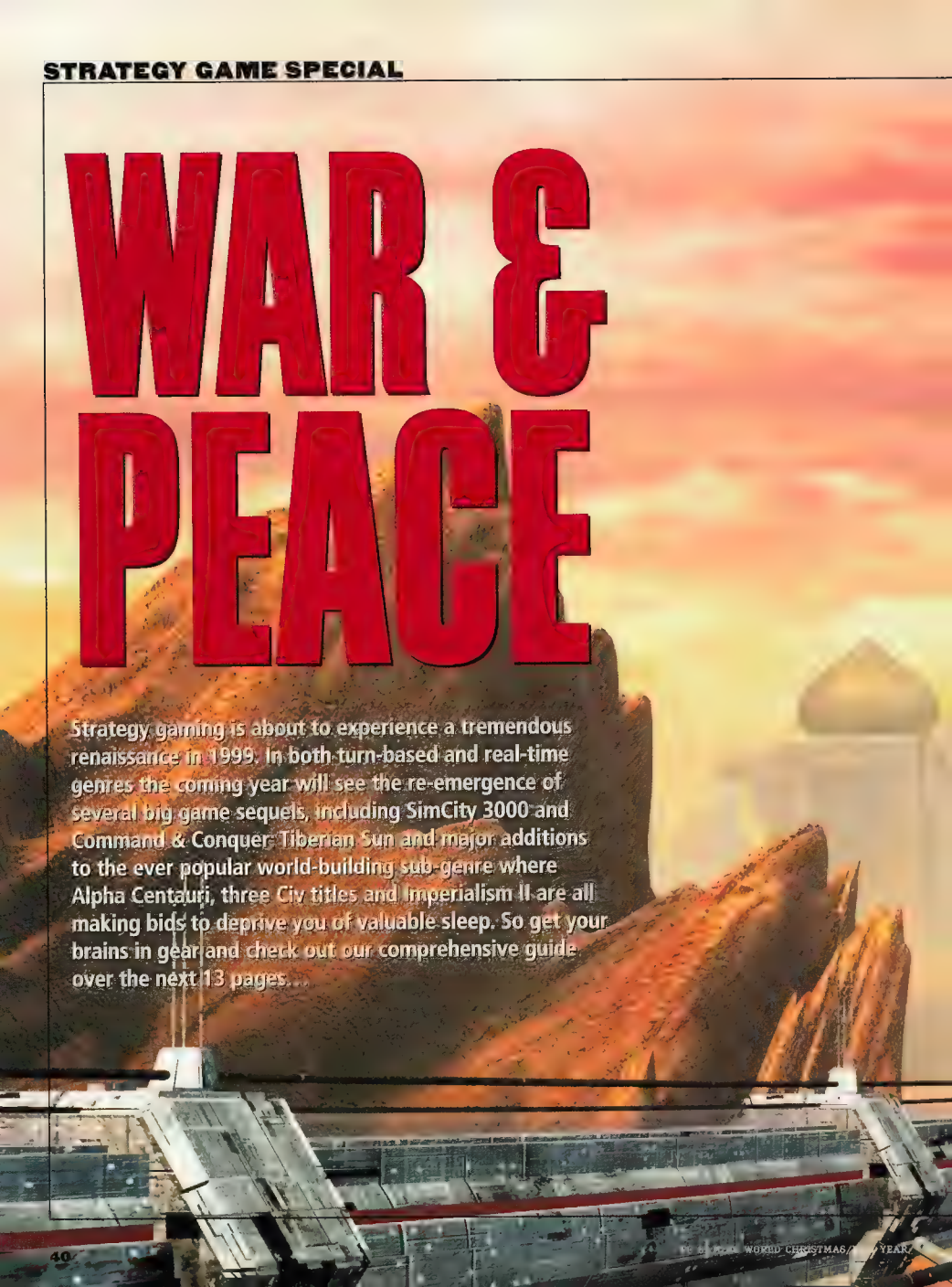
- Do run the defrag utility regularly
- Don't go installing anything and everything, and be particularly careful about what you install and uninstall in the Program Files folder. If you don't need it regularly, leave it on the CD
- Check your games are aware which 3D accelerator to use. The default 'primary display adapter' is your 2D/3D card. Secondary adapter would be a stand-alone 3D card. Most modern titles should give you the choice, but some may still need to be told
- Back up your system registry regularly (Start, Run, Regedit), particularly when you install new hardware
- Don't just delete programs willy-nilly. Whenever possible, use the program's uninstaller, or use Add/Remove Programs in the Control Panel. This will save you having a confused an unhappy system registry
- Check your drives (right-click, Properties) to make sure they are using FAT32 as a file system. If not, you need to use Win98's Drive Converter (Start, Program, Accessories, System Tools)



Selecting Network Server speeds hard disk access

WAR & PEACE

Strategy gaming is about to experience a tremendous renaissance in 1999. In both turn-based and real-time genres the coming year will see the re-emergence of several big game sequels, including SimCity 3000 and Command & Conquer: Tiberian Sun and major additions to the ever popular world-building sub-genre where Alpha Centauri, three Civ titles and Imperialism II are all making bids to deprive you of valuable sleep. So get your brains in gear and check out our comprehensive guide over the next 13 pages...



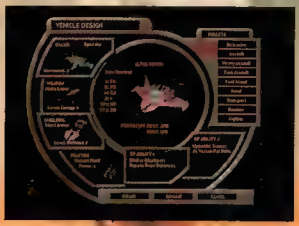
SID MEIER'S ALPHA CENTAURI

Genre: Turn-based space sci-fi
Label: Electronic Arts
Developer: Firaxis
Due: 12 February 99

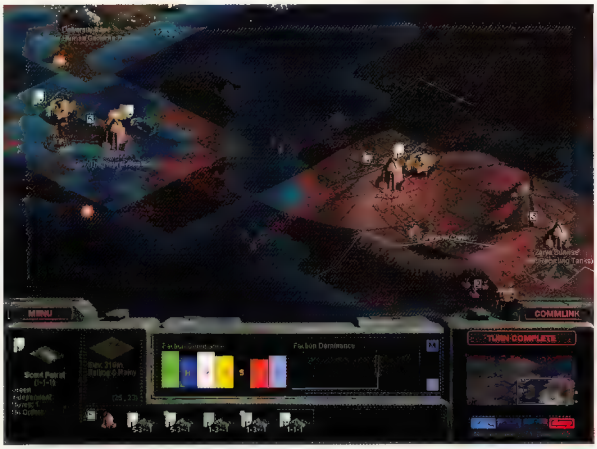
It's typical isn't it? You manage to get away from Earth at last, leaving death, destruction and noisy neighbours behind you. You find yourself on a completely new planet with untapped, diverse resources and bountiful landscapes – and then you discover that someone has got there before you. Someone from Earth... those noisy bloody neighbours again, intent on death and destruction.

This is the situation in Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri – the follow-up to the awesomely successful Civilization II. Anyone worried about a departure from the values that made Civilization such a success needn't be – he's not known in some quarters as Civ Meier, for nothing. Alpha Centauri is an all-encompassing planetary colonisation strategy game, where the setting, 100 years in the future, allows lots of weird and wonderful technologies and innovations to be used and where, unencumbered by traditional Earth limitations, the imagination can flourish.

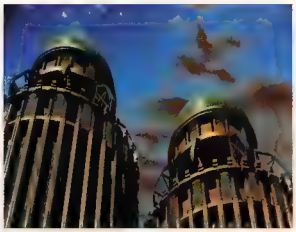
Having said that, the three pillars of Civ-style games remain: war, diplomacy and trade. There are seven competitive factions colonising Alpha Centauri, and what an odd collection of names they have: The Gaians, The University Of Planet, The Human Hive, The Peacekeepers, The Morganites, The Spartans and the Believers. They vary greatly in orientation – The Hive is despotic, the University is being dedicated to science and learning and the Peacekeepers are interested in human welfare and mental development,



...nuff (Civ): Diplomatic blaster may see you through. Right: Tweak ships to suit your needs



Scout and about: Patrols will not only encounter resources but locate enclaves of rival colonists



for example. You can choose to play any side, but you won't be able to solely rely on one type of strategy to succeed as any one race. While The University has strengths in the development of ecology, higher technologies and psychology it can't ignore military development or it will fail.

We played an early version of the game as the University side (with a starter for 10 of course) to get a flavour of Alpha Centauri. At the beginning there was a choice of areas to research: Mobility, Information Networks, Industrial, Social, Biogenetics and Ecology. Level 1 Mobility research gives you reconnaissance vehicles, while Level 1 Industrial research gives you armour. Social research includes psychology and can enable you to get more out of fewer workers, Ecology includes study of weather patterns and resultant improved agriculture and Biogenetics gives your faction an understanding of areas as diverse as recycling, gene splicing and bio-repairs. There are more than 15 levels of research and some subjects are cross-disciplinary.

As well as all-important research, Alpha Centauri offers opportunities to mine, farm, harvest solar and other forms of power and you can build land, air, space and sea units. Certain scenarios have victory conditions that do not necessarily include total domination by war, and in some instances you can set your own victory conditions.

Diplomacy is just as important as war, and on Alpha Centauri it is very complex. You can form the usual alliances and treaties, but your image among other players is judged in many ways – not least by how many atrocities you have committed. In fact there is a special section in the diplomacy menu all about atrocities and you will be very popular with, say, The Hive if you commit them, though understandably less so with The Peacekeepers. Indeed one of the commands in the diplomacy section is an 'I am an atrocity victim' message, designed to glean sympathy and support from more moderate factions. A measure of the way the game is pitched might be judged from the six difficulty levels, known as Citizen, Specialist, Talent, Librarian, Thinker and Transcendent. There's not much about war to be found here.

Research is crucial on Alpha Centauri – choose your path on this menu

Morganite civilisation goes big on modernist architecture

Technology. No technology. You choose

Alpha Centauri is a turn-based game and it's just as well – there are so many possibilities that you really do need to sit back and think about it, take notes even, as your colony grows. The version we saw still largely used placement graphics but wide planetary weather variations like snow and monsoons, natural events and emergencies and the abundance of technological innovations should lead to a fascinating final version.

Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri is sure to appeal to both Civilization and Masters Of Orion fans with its established colonisation and development elements alongside an all-new, rich science-fiction storyline.

Alan Dykes

SIMCITY 3000

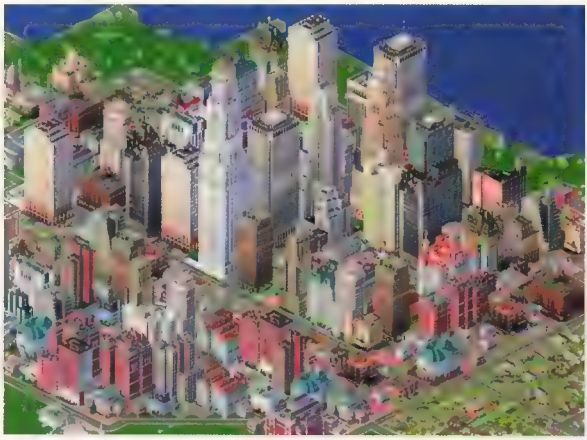
Genre: Real-time city sim
Label: Maxis
Developer: In-house
Due: 5 February 99

Few games have stood the test of time like SimCity and its '3D' follow-up, SimCity 2000. Ask most serious gamers who were using PCs around 1993 and chances are you'll find this mayor-cum-property mogul simulation fits into their top 10 games of all time. It's taken Maxis five years to come up with a second sequel worthy of the name, but how do you improve something that's already so nearly perfect?

Two or three years ago it was thought that true 3D was the answer, allowing you to set up a city and then zoom down into it, enter the buildings, drive around the streets and see it at ground level. A strange concept, since most cities look nicer from an airplane – especially one travelling away from them – but those were the days of SimCopter, when everything looked bright on the 3D front. Sense, scale and good taste prevailed however and the game we will see on shop shelves early in the New Year will be a thoroughly modernised version of the isometric version seen in SimCity 2000.

For those unfamiliar with the concept, Sim City involves planning an expanding conurbation, modernising it and watching it grow. The idea is a simple one: if you build decent facilities, people will come and colonise your town. A game starts off either at 1900, 1950 or 2000 and you have a budget (the bigger the amount, the easier the game) to kick things off by building and zoning. The first prerequisite is a power plant, then industrial and residential zones, which are connected to the power station via overhead powerlines. Next you build a water plant and connect your zones with pipes. Finally you build a road or railway to another town (at the edge of your playing map) and if folks are suitably impressed with your planning they may just choose to come and settle, build houses and businesses and start your town off properly. From there it's a matter of maintaining your existing infrastructure and adding anything that will attract new folks and industry.

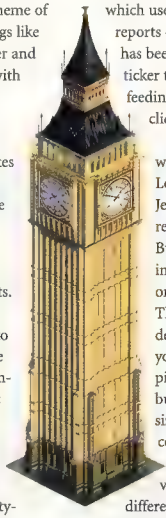
Factors effecting your city will include the quality of the environment – the number of parks, football stadiums and so on, the level of pollution from industry and



Special tiles sets allow you to try to recreate real cityscapes such as New York or London

the density of housing. You must raise money by taxation and you'll have to provide for trade and transport by building more roads, multi-lane highways, trains, ports and airports as your revenues grow and technology permits. One theme of the game is regeneration – things like power plants do not last for ever and pollution becomes a problem with coal-fired ones, so oil, wind generation, hydro-electric and eventually nuclear power all become available at suitable dates (and prices). Likewise as time moves on you'll need to provide service zoning for offices and shops, while old buildings will need to be knocked down to make way for new developments. Police are needed to handle crime and firemen are needed to put out fires and you'll soon see public finances spiral out of control. It all adds up to a dynamic and absorbing game.

SimCity 3000 takes all these elements and adds new graphics, a new interface, some new features and a variety of city-specific ideas. Landscapes are now smoother and more realistic (SimCity 2000's were very blocky), while building graphics will be a lot more detailed. The interface has moved away from the tiny movable menu bars of SimCity 2000 towards a bigger, easier-to-distinguish frame with cartoon-ish graphics running around the right-hand side and bottom of the playing screen. Meanwhile, the newspaper which used to supply you with progress reports on how your city is developing has been replaced by a Reuters-style ticker that scrolls along the bottom feeding you headlines which you can click on for the full story.



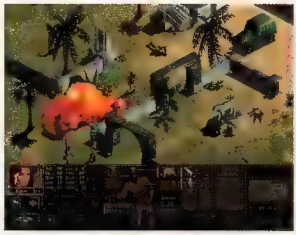
Most excitingly, new tile sets will allow you to virtually recreate London, Athens, New York, Jerusalem and other cities – with replicas of Big Ben, the Chrysler Building and the historic buildings of the near and Middle East on offer as well as realistic terrain. There will also be a buildings design tool, allowing you to create your own architectural masterpieces. The available space to build on will be four times the size of Sim City 2000, adding considerable scope and longevity.

From a playtest of an early version there seems to be little difference in the actual style of play in Sim City 3000, change seems to hinge mainly on detail. But this is not necessarily negative. Variations on the wheel are a good thing – changing its shape would be madness.

Alan Dykes

JAGGED ALLIANCE II

Genre: Real-time/turn-based modern-era
Label: TBA
Developer: Sir-Tech
Due: Mid-99



Exotic locations for firefights include Mayan ruins

In the TV series of *Mission: Impossible*, agent Jim Phelps and crew corrected wrongs in the Latin American country of the week with a few high-tech toys and a lot of latex disguises. By the 90s, action films were tending to liberate said country with a small cadre of muscular, well-armed individuals with a penchant for torching everything in sight. Jagged Alliance II, however, comes as close as any game we've seen to being a happy marriage of both methods.

In Jagged Alliance II you have to restore freedom to the tiny nation of Arulca, now in the clutches of your arch-enemy from the original game. You begin by recruiting mercenaries over the Web, building a band that has the right chemistry and skills to pull off the mission. Combat is even more like X-COM: UFO than ever (a good thing), as it goes from real-time strategic to turn-based tactical once an enemy is sighted. Mercs can now run, climb and crawl.

The roleplaying aspects, one of the main enjoyments of the original – have been fleshed out, so you may find yourself having to deal carefully with the local populace to avoid being betrayed, for instance.

When you've exhausted your solo replay options and the campaigns, you can even outfit squads and take them online to outdo your mercenary-inclined buddies.

Terry Coleman

AGE OF EMPIRES II: AGE OF KINGS

Genre: Real-time strategy
Label: Microsoft
Developer: Ensemble Studios
Due: March 99

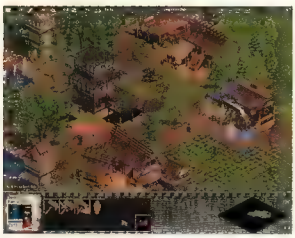
The visuals are of the same meticulous quality as the first game, but the building scale is larger

The long-awaited sequel to the classic Age Of Empires moves out of the Iron Age and into the monarchic mayhem of Medieval times. At this moment the work crews at Ensemble are building battering rams, cannon galleys, unit formations, and castles ready for a late spring assault on the world of real-time strategy games.

The basic premise and interface are the same as the original. In Age Of Kings you'll pick one of 13 civilisations and lead it through four ages to build a 'wonder' or soak the Earth with the blood of your enemies. A new option, Regicide, offers a different victory condition by letting you play capture the flag with a royal.

All of the pathfinding and unit AI is being rewritten. Units will be smart enough to find their way to any accessible location. They'll also stay together if grouped, so defensive units can escort trade goods or relics. All units will have the same pathfinding ability, so the computer player won't have the upper hand.

Improving the first game's weak AI is one of the development team's main goals. Villagers will automatically give way to those dropping off resources, and they'll get out of the way of advancing troops. Military units will look smarter and fight better. They can be told to guard a unit or building, and you can set their aggressiveness level. In aggressive mode they will attack and pursue anything they see. In defensive mode they will engage attackers and return to their positions. In addition, units will take advantage of targets of opportunity. Paladins, for example, will ride to the range of their line of sight to spear a villager.



The simple day-to-day life of a Japanese village, with male and female villagers tending a farm, blacksmith shop, stable and mill

Computer opponents should play smarter as well. In the original, computer players had a preset strategy in each game. In Age Of Kings, opponents will react to what's going on in the game. If they see an opportunity to build a wonder, they'll do it; if they realise they need to tear your wonder down, they'll try to do that, too. Even better, they'll make or break alliances based on their purposes. All these changes are being brought in with the aim of making the experience much closer to that of playing a human player.

Formations will play a key role in Age Of Kings, but the team is still working on implementing them. In most cases, the AI will select a default formation based on unit types. These will usually take the form of columns and lines, with archers automatically taking position behind swordsmen or pikemen. You can also form a phalanx or wedge, or you can form a box around a unit such as a trade cart or priest. The team is experimenting with custom formation options, as well.

Instead of artefacts, Age Of Kings will have relics. Relics confer special benefits on their owners, such as generating gold in churches or inspiring soldiers on the battlefield.

Castles should play a pivotal role in the new game. The castle is a large military facility that lets you build the special 'super unit' unique to each culture. Castle assaults require siege weapons such as battering rams, trebuchets, mangonels (similar to a stone thrower) and bombard cannons. Unfortunately, the game currently won't let you put archers on the walls, but you will be able to garrison troops in towers.

Warships will now shoot cannon, blast Greek Fire or ram other ships, and you will be able to build boarding ships to take over enemy ships. And new, high-capacity trade boats even open up the possibility of piracy.

Ken Brown

HOMEWORLD

Genre: Real-time sci-fi
Label: Sierra Studios
Developer: Relic Entertainment
Due: February 99

3D accelerated graphics give an epic feel whether rendering shifting nebulae or brilliant explosions

Did you ever want to jump out of your Excalibur star fighter in a Wing Commander game and start calling the shots instead of just taking them? Did you ever wonder just who was drawing up the mission plans in TIE Fighter? Well, Homeworld should be the answer to your prayers – it serves up heaps of epic space combat where you create and command huge fleets of space vessels instead of piloting them. As leader of an entire civilisation fleeing adversaries who've driven you from your adopted home, you'll traverse space in a race to find the legendary planet of your origin, the 'homeworld' of the title.

Visually, the game is stunning. Using virtually every 3D trick in the book, the design team has created a vibrant, living world in the cold expanses of deep space. It's a universe of richly detailed space ships, beautiful, shifting nebulas, and fields of bobbing asteroids.

Adding to the game's graphic appeal is its zoom feature. Pulling out for a wide view will allow you to take in every ship in the sector – fighters trailing ion streams, gently spinning research stations, enemy bombers peppering the hull of your massive mothership with exploding plasma bombs. Zoom in tight, and you can ride right behind a wing of attacking fighters.

Viewing your position from various angles will be vital to your success, so Homeworld uses a camera with a full 360 degrees of freedom. This allows you to whip from a view high above your mothership to just below it in a heartbeat. Should you need to check on scout ships far from your primary position, you'll just call up the strategic map of that sector and click on those units to be instantly transported to their position.

Directing the actions of units in a true 3D environment presents a slew of challenges not present in other strategy games. You can't simply select a unit then click on a point in space – how does it know where on that plane you want it to go? Should it move straight ahead or five miles deeper? So developer Relic is creating an interface that will provide precision control without hampering players' enjoyment. A great deal of the interface relies on using the keyboard, so gamers who've never used hotkeys for actions in games such as StarCraft will probably have some adjusting to do. Keys are used not only for movement, but to call up the strategic map, to set unit posture for guarding and the like, and to select formations.

Using formations you should be able to set up squadrons of Interceptors in wedge formation to penetrate and scatter an enemy before following up with a solid line of Corvettes to pound them into oblivion.

Defence will pretty much hinge on your deployment of units. You'll need to place your more valuable and vulnerable scanners, research stations, and mothership in the centre of a growing fleet. Lighter, quicker craft like Interceptors and Bombers will need to patrol the edges of your 'base' to extinguish or severely damage attacking forces. Defenders will be particularly handy. They are formidable vessels when they stick to guarding your assets. Environmental elements can also be exploited in defence – for example, gas clouds can be charged to create impassable electrical fields or to give enemy harvesting vessels a devastating shock.

Research is undertaken using modular research stations. Unlike other games where specific buildings research specific technologies, the research station will be responsible for all scientific advancement. Research may be slow at first, but you can increase your speed by building additional station modules that will attach to the others. As the research structure grows, so will your research speed. Alternatively, you may research more than one technology by assigning different research tasks to separate station modules. New technologies will allow you to create new ships, develop better weapons, and access even more technologies.

Homeworld has the potential to be a breakthrough title – by fully using 3D technology it certainly will add a whole new dimension to the genre.

Robert Coffey

THE DRAGON SLAYER

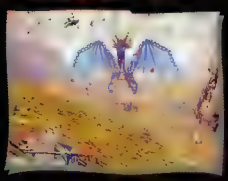
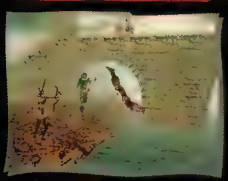
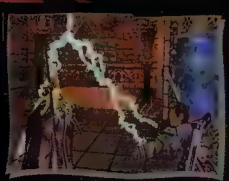
ASGHAN

"..... shaping up to be the game that Deathtrap Dungeon and Die By The Sword originally promised to be."

PC FORMAT

- Award winning 3D engine
- Run, jump, swim & climb around incredible 3D environments
- 1st and 3rd person views
- Use your sword, crossbows and magic to slash through over 60 different gruesome monsters
- Solve complex puzzles, escape deadly traps and discover hidden secrets in an immersive adventure full of evil and witchcraft
- Explore a variety of astounding locations including forests, underwater ruins and terrifying dungeons

Silmarils

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CIVILIZATION: CALL TO POWER

Genre: Turn-based historical
Label: Activision
Developer: In-house
Due: Late spring

It's a good thing that all the legal fuss has died down over Civilization: Call To Power, because Activision's offering appears sufficiently like Sid Meier's Civilization to have any lawyer muttering 'look and feel' in his sleep.

Just imagine the three-quarter perspective of Sid Meier's Civ II in 16-bit colour, with bigger sprites à la Age Of Empires, and you have a good idea of the game's layout. The varying time scale, with turns representing fewer and fewer years as you enter the modern era, is left virtually unchanged. Even now, the pacing and the flow of the game is very Civ-like, so the design team has nailed at least one aspect of its intended audience.

Several things have changed from Civ II, however. The Great Library is now reduced to essentially a Civilopedia, and a lot of your other favourite Wonders of the World are either footnotes or missing altogether. The good news is that the new Wonders of the World are interesting, and there are a lot more of them proportionally later in history.

The most controversial of the new Wonders is undoubtedly going to be the Emancipation Proclamation. You see, Civilization: Call To Power is the first game in a long time to deal with the emotionally charged institution of slavery throughout history. While some gamers may find the very idea repugnant, it hardly seems out of place in a game in which every civilisation can blithely go around nuking one another. In Call To Power, using slave labour is cheaper than using your own populace, and this temptation tends to lessen with more enlightened forms of government. The Emancipation Proclamation effectively ends slavery as an institution, not only gaining victory (and moral) points for your side, but also likely wrecking the economy of your enemies. Whether it will work with Civ fans remains to be seen – and if you don't like it you can always toggle it off.

Even with the slicker interface and better graphics, it's still Civ – and that's a good thing

The freshest things in Call To Power aren't so much the new units as the new government types. Most of these are variations on unpleasant aspects of history generally ignored by games. My favourites are the Ecotopians, a bizarre group that seemingly idolises the 'Free Love' period of the 1960s, but is prone to outbursts of extreme violence – sort of GreenPeace meets Islamic Jihad. In addition to normal combat, these eco-terrorists can set off an LSD-like bomb in an enemy city, which tends to render it somewhat ineffective, whether or not it goes into revolt immediately. The Ecotopians even have their own anti-Wonder, a Genesis device that remakes all life on the planet in a new image.

Religion is present as well, with clerics that are reasonably close to priests from Age Of Empires. In addition to a straight conversion of the enemy to your side, you can also drain an enemy city of gold, entice its population to revolt, and other nasty things, all in the name of organised religion. The advanced unit of the cleric in Call To Power is the televangelist, which is every bit as creepy as it sounds…

Since Activision doesn't have access to Civ II's source code, it may be hard for it to match that design's sophisticated diplomacy system, but they do have a fairly detailed menu-driven interface in place to let you trade land or goods for cash or military units.

Combat, on the other hand, is already pretty well fleshed out. Unlike Civ II, Call To Power gives you advantages for attacking or defending with a stack of units. As you go further into the future, you get more high-tech units, such as a futuristic U2-style spy plane, which may or may not be based on the rumoured Aurora of the US Air Force. In general, there seems to be more of an emphasis of recon units that help to lift the fog of war. In another departure from classic Civ, units can utilise a more active defensive posture, and some units even have ranged combat.

Will all of these changes from classic Civ lore work? It's hard to say, though we had a good time with the beta. The play balance is the thing here, as many of your tried-and-true Civ strategies will need some tweaking, if you are to survive in this New World order.

Terry Coleman

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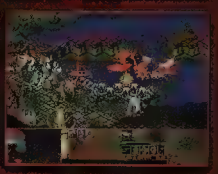
You must take control of this epic war and lead your armies into battle in the most adventurous strategy game ever.

Rival Realms features everything that's great about real time strategy games - a great plot, a wide variety of characters, excellent AI, heart-stopping battles, bags of visual appeal, a user friendly interface and best of all total replayability!



Rival Realms

Available in November on PC CD ROM

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TITUS

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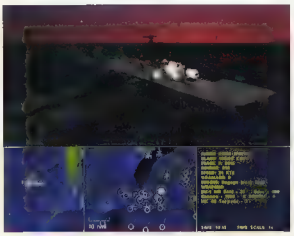
FLEET COMMAND

Genre: Real-time strategy
Label: Jane's Combat Simulations
Developer: Sonalysts
Due: 26 February 99

Jane's Combat Simulations – a co-operative venture between Electronic Arts and the original Jane's – built a reputation for accurately portraying weapons systems with titles like Longbow, F-15, and 688(I) Hunter/Killer. Now it's turning its sights on strategy gaming with Fleet Command, a real-time naval warfare strategy game.

Although the game has a command interface that's no harder to use than C&C's, the battles aren't simplified and abstracted the way they are in most real-time strategy games. You'll watch your attacks play out in a 3D window that seems ripped straight from a flight simulation.

Fleet Command's weapons roster includes the major naval and naval/aerial weapons systems for 19 countries. With its inclusion



Smoke and missile trails highlight the launch of a surface-to-surface missile

of ocean maps for the entire planet, this provides a literal whole world of possibilities for potential missions.

Each force is equipped with a fairly complete lineup of current-technology ships and aircraft. To get the most out of them you'll want to understand each unit and weapon's strengths. This is where the Jane's connection comes in – if you need more data, just select a unit and press the appropriate key and you can get full information and descriptions from Jane's Fighting Ships and Jane's All the World's Aircraft.

Fleet Command will include three mission types: training, single missions, and campaigns. It will feature texture-mapped 3D terrain, moving seas, and highly detailed 3D vehicles. These vehicles display damage when hit, and when you fire a ship or plane's weapons it shoots from the appropriate location, complete with semi-transparent smoke trails. The game will support Glide, Direct3D, and OpenGL.

The 3D interface doesn't give you an unrealistic advantage when it comes to identifying the enemy. When you've detected a unit but haven't yet sent in a recon flight to identify it, it's shown in the 3D window as a plain, generic ship or aircraft shape. This unit anonymity is important because many missions will require you to make an ID before firing on the enemy.

Denny Atkin

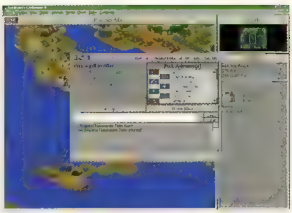
CIVILIZATION II MULTIPLAYER GOLD EDITION

Genre: Turn-based historical
Label: Hasbro Interactive
Developer: MicroProse
Due: Early 99

You have to feel a little sympathy for MicroProse. Here it is with a new version of one of the greatest games of all time, wondering exactly how far it can stretch the design. Do too much that's unfamiliar, and you risk alienating the more than one million fans of Sid Meier's Civilization II. Add too little that's new, and you have in effect no more than a multiplayer patch for a two-year-old game.

Civ II Multiplayer Gold will at least make use of full 32-bit code. It also supports TCP/IP, IPX, LAN and play-by-email, complete with standard and simultaneous turns. There's also an optional timer for each player.

Our experience when playing multiplayer was that some of the scenarios worked



Civ II: More diplomacy than Age Of Empires

rather well, but it's hard to finish a full campaign game. To be fair, Civ II works much better with four to six people than Master Of Orion II ever did, and while it isn't as smooth as Age Of Empires, there is a bigger diplomatic element.

Even for solo players, this might be a good buy, because you get classic Civ II (which now runs faster), plus a number of additional scenarios.

Terry Coleman

CIVILIZATION II: TEST OF TIME

Genre: Turn-based historical
Label: Hasbro Interactive
Developer: MicroProse
Due: Early 99

OK, you already have one product – Civ II Multiplayer – in production, so you add another. Huh? What's more confusing is that no one at MicroProse seems to know where this product is going. It's evidently going to have a lot of scenarios and a full campaign based on the Midgard world from Civ II: Fantastic Worlds.

Aside from the attempts to add a little 3D and some animation to the three-quarter Civ II perspective, little else seems new here. They can't even guarantee that Test Of Time will support multiplay. Part of the problem is that MicroProse management has insisted that every product in the Civ II line must be backwards compatible. With that kind of thinking, it's no wonder we have this muddled mess instead of a potential Civ III.

STAR TREK: STAR FLEET COMMAND

Genre: Real-time sci-fi
Label: Interplay
Developer: Quicksilver
Due: Spring 99

Nearly 20 years ago, an enterprising engineer licensed the *Star Trek Technical Manual* as source data for a science-fiction tactical starship combat boardgame he was developing. Word quickly got around that Star Fleet Battles was as close as you were likely to get to being Captain Kirk or a secretive Romulan commander. As time went on, however, the boardgame added so many rules that it nearly collapsed under its own weight. Luckily for Trekkers, Interplay's Star Fleet Command returns to the classic SFB, with the often tedious impulse system of the boardgame replaced by thoughtfully paced real-time movement on the PC.

This is no space sim: you manoeuvre your fleet of starships through a panoramic view very much like that from *Star Trek: Wrath of Khan*. Anyone who wants to go phaser-happy will find it hard because the game models energy use, critical hits, damage control, and crew quality.

Ship design is a key element

New races from the boardgame – Lyrans and Hydrans, among others – have been added to the official Star Trek universe with Paramount Pictures' permission, which means more starfaring races and more cool sci-fi weaponry to play with. Over 100 different hulls of various races are planned for inclusion, so that you could cruise near the Neutral Zone with a souped-up Romulan War Eagle, take on diplomatic missions in an Enterprise-class Federation Heavy Cruiser, or hide in a nearby nebula in your sporty new Orion Pirate Raider.

Star Fleet now supports D3D, and it's possible that there will be a software-only solution as well, but Interplay isn't guaranteeing this as yet. The AI is still being tweaked, but multiplayer already works – there are plans are to support up to four players by LAN and IPX.

The only concern I currently have is how well the Dynaverse (dynamic universe) campaign will turn out. It's certainly ambitious to let gamers pursue their own individual careers in an open-ended game, and if Quicksilver and Interplay can pull it off, we could have the Star Trek computer combat game we've always wanted to play.

Terry Coleman

BRAVEHEART

Genre: Hybrid historical
Label: Eidos Interactive
Developer: Red Lemon
Due: Winter 99

Formerly known as Tartan Army, Braveheart has a brand new movie licence and some seriously ambitious design plans. It might even be the first game with a movie licence that, dare we say it, isn't actually cack…

A lot of that promise lies in the fact that Braveheart isn't concerned with trying to recreate or rehash a movie – from the start the focus has been on compelling gameplay. You play as a Scottish clan leader in the Dark Ages. With the country's clans torn apart by rivalries and everyone under the cruel thumb of the English, your path to victory lies one of three ways: conquer all the clans; obtain enough allies to force a vote and ascend to the throne; or drive those balshy Englishmen off your island.

The battle portions of the game are reminiscent of Myth, with a swooping camera taking in the carnage. The free-moving perspective is more expansive than Myth, zooming out for a distant bird's-eye view or moving all the way in to the first-person view of your leader. The fields of war are rendered in full 3D and are already looking stunning as they involve thousands of animated polygonal units, including swordsmen, archers, ladder brigades for scaling walls and catapults.

Troops can be ordered to form lines, wedges, circles, and more. This will allow you to set a wall of pikeman in front of charging English cavalry or to put a protective circle of axemen around more vulnerable units. Unit facing will also play a part in determining your success, with units delivering considerably more damage when attacking their enemy's flank or rear.

Braveheart combines tactical and strategic play

As compelling as the battle sequences will be, there is an additional, larger scale level of strategy to the game as well. Operating from a map of Scotland, aspiring William Wallaces will have to manage their growing number of clans, set supply lines, conduct research, create and move armies, and juggle diplomatic relations.

Robert Coffey

WARZONE 2100

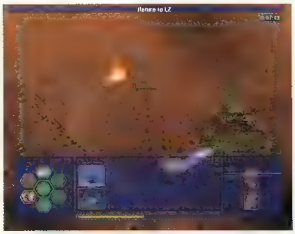
Genre: Real-time sci-fi
Label: Eidos
Developer: Pumpkin Studios
Due: February 99

With every other real-time strategy title scrambling to find some way to distinguish itself, Warzone 2100 has left it to the player to create what's unique about the game. How? By letting gamers design their own forces.

Warzone 2100 doesn't veer far from the tried and true in terms of core gameplay – gamers still must explore, find energy resources, research technology, and build units for combat. But when it comes to what units to build, well, that's where things get different. As gamers acquire technology they can set out upon various research paths to upgrade and develop their forces. They will then be able to construct their units according to what they know through a three-step unit design interface. By choosing which type of turret, body type, and propulsion source to use upon a vehicle, gamers can build the units they think will be best suited for the mission at hand. With about 400 options from which to choose, there are thousands of possibilities.

While individual design characteristics will obviously determine a unit's effectiveness, experience will play a part as well. Vehicles will carry over from one mission to the next, accruing experience that will allow them to perform more efficiently. Take care of your units and you can have an accomplished, deadly fighting force after just a handful of scenarios.

This persistent world quality will carry over to other parts of Warzone 2100 as well. Instead of presenting the player with a new map for every mission, the original map will expand in range. Thus, your original base must be developed and protected throughout a series of missions. This doesn't mean you'll be stuck with the same map during the game – there will be 38 missions spread across three campaigns taking place in valleys, mountains, and ravaged cities.



Elevations are depicted using 3D terrain

Not surprisingly, Warzone 2100 has jumped aboard the 3D bandwagon and will feature true 3D terrain and vehicles. Elevation will affect combat effectiveness, with higher units having a decided advantage over forces on lower ground.

Robert Coffey

MACHINES

Genre: Real-time sci-fi
Label: Acclaim
Developer: In-house
Due: March 99

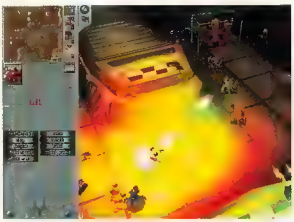
If the lousy pathfinding and imprecise unit response of some real-time games has just about driven you away from the genre, you may want to give Machines a look when it ships this spring. While Machines lets you command your forces both from an isometric third-person perspective and a free roaming, ground level view, it will also let you jump into any of your units and steer it, aim it, and fire it. Perfect for missions requiring precise manoeuvring, this feature will let you guide vital units deep into enemy bases, dodging defensive fire, to actually enter enemy facilities to steal or sabotage technology. Strategists who fear they lack the reflexes necessary to pull this off, may rest assured – missions will be designed so you can still win without guiding your forces personally.

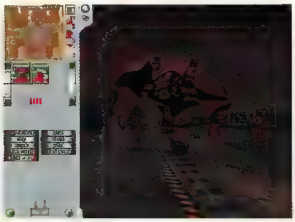
As the sentient machines slug it out across a series of planets in 30 branching missions, your forces will have to seek out upgrades for your forces.

Hardware upgrades for the 18 basic machines should pump the unit total up to about 50, while software upgrades will increase your scanner range, improve your weapons' firing distance, and make your 'unmanned' machines smarter by improving their pathfinding. Night vision upgrades will be vital since the gameworld will cycle through day and night.

All of this will be delivered in glorious 3D, with hardware acceleration required for the 3D terrain, fully polygonal units, and dynamic lighting and environment effects.

Robert Coffey



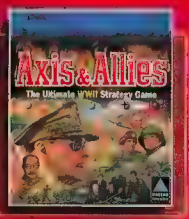


The basic 18 machines can be upgraded to bring the game's total unit count to 50

Change world history with a single click

Axis & Allies

The year is 1942. The world is at war. You are a powerful leader struggling for supremacy. Your objective: global domination: Your strategy: armoured assaults, bombing raids and naval offensives to name but a few! Your opponents: only some of the greatest war legends ever! Have you got what it takes to rule the world? Take on the Axis or Allies and find out!



www.axisandallies.com Includes internet function for global multi-play.

Check out these other great strategy games :

HASBRO Interactive

ROLLER COASTER TYCOON

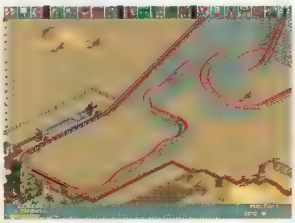
Genre: Real-time carnival
Label: Hasbro Interactive/MicroProse
Developer: Chris Sawyer
Due: Spring 99

As a rule, roller coaster games put me off my feed, because they tend to remind me of that horrid Disney wireframe game of a few years ago – really, it was more like a CAD program masquerading as a roller coaster game. Well, I'm happy to report that my appetite is quite healthy after spending time looping around in Roller Coaster Tycoon.

If the title reminds you of MicroProse's Transport Tycoon, it should – both games are by the same designer, Chris Sawyer. The difference is that Roller Coaster Tycoon never stops being fun. It's a lot like SimCity, in that you can keep on designing death-defying rides without paying attention to the campaign game – which has a lot of depth, as you research and develop new rides, while simultaneously trying to keep your customers happy and turn a profit. In fact, the game reminds me a bit of Theme Park, except that it's better-looking, and a lot easier to play – which the producer proved to me by putting together a towering roller coaster in less than 10 minutes, complete with squealing teenagers and people staggering off the ride looking somewhat queasy.

We're always asking for something different, and Roller Coaster Tycoon should fit the bill – just bring your own candyfloss.

Terry Coleman



Rides will be quick and easy to build

FIGHTING STEEL

Genre: Real-time naval WWII
Label: Mindscape
Developer: SSi
Due: Spring 99

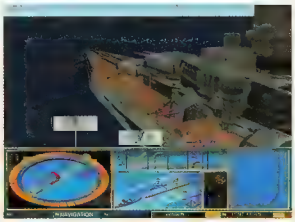
The lines between ship simulators and wargames always blur a bit, particularly since reflexes at sea – at least in games – are not quite so important as they are in the air. But we'll claim Fighting Steel as a naval wargame, because it requires that you think in terms of task forces, rather than as the captain of an individual vessel.

While Fighting Steel emphasises the giving of orders to vessels, not every ship will snap to as quickly as you'd like, because everything is dependent on crew quality. Mediocre crews not only take longer to zero in on a designated target, they don't reload as fast, and they tend to drift out of formation. So, especially during night battles, you can easily create the chaos of a WWII naval battle in Fighting Steel with no real increase in complexity for the gamer.

Once the more than 100 ship classes are ready to go, they'll sail through campaigns for both the Japanese and Allies from 1941–43. Although the timeline may seem limiting, Fighting Steel is strictly a surface ship combat game – there are no subs and no aircraft carriers, which doesn't leave a whole lot to simulate after 1943.

Fighting Steel is intended to support IPX, TCP/IP, and LAN – a very good thing, since the game is most likely to hit its stride when played online. After all, most naval battles historically were essentially over in an hour or less.

Terry Coleman



Ships on offer include the formidable Bismarck

SHADOW COMPANY

Genre: Real-time modern
Label: Interactive Magic
Developer: Sinister Games
Due: March 99

If Shadow Company lives up to the promise of its pre-alpha, it could be the answer for gamers eager to lead small squads in realistic, combat intensive operations.

You lead a band of mercenaries, recruited by a less than ethical mercenary corporation, which is left behind in hostile territory after a private war goes sour. Vowing revenge on the traitors who hired you, your team fights its way back to civilisation.

Visually, Shadow Company is striking. The gameworld is realistically detailed, with all units, objects, and vehicles rendered in 3D. A smooth zoom function lets you pull out for a large, bird's eye view of a mission site or move in tightly in order to manage more detailed troop movement.

The game will be broken up into campaigns and missions will contain multiple objectives. There should be lots of items at your disposal to help ensure success. Weapons will include rifles, explosives, and grenade launchers and you'll also have access to scuba gear, flak jackets, wire cutters, binoculars, and starlight goggles.

Missions will take place in a variety of environments. Expect to take on bad guys in deserts, tropical islands, savannah, and frozen tundra. These locales are more than window dressing and will come alive with dynamic, physics-based weather effects including rain, wind that affects bullet trajectory, and snow in which you can leave footprints.

Robert Coffey

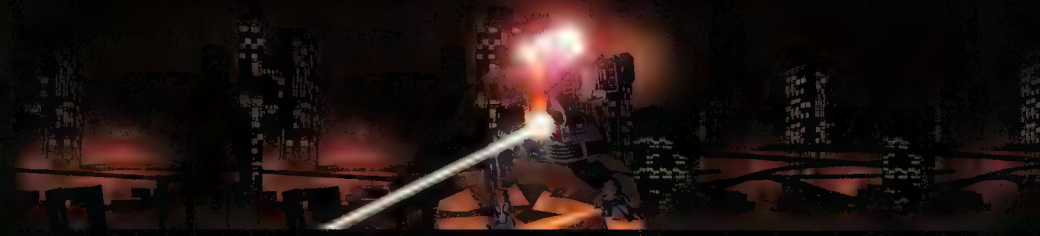
You can use terrain to sneak up on the enemy

FUTURE COP L.A.P.D.

SERVE · PROTECT · SURVIVE

The City of Angels needs a saviour.

Leave your halo at home.



IT'S THE 22ND CENTURY. THE MEAN STREETS OF LOS ANGELES HAVE GOT EVEN MEANER. CRIMINAL GANGS BATTLE FOR CONTROL. BUT THEY HAVE A NEW ENEMY. YOU. CLAD IN CERAMITE ARMOUR AND WIELDING THE LATEST PLASMA TECHNOLOGY, YOUR MISSION IS TO WIPE OUT THE BAD GUYS. AND IF YOU CAN TAKE THE HEAT, GO HEAD-TO-HEAD IN 2-PLAYER SPLIT SCREEN MODE. OR DIE TRYING.

PlayStation

PC CD

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WARHAMMER 40,000: RITES OF WAR

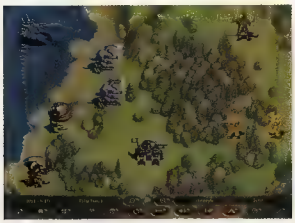
Genre: Turn-based fantasy
Label: Mindscape
Developer: SSI/Dreamforge
Due: Summer 99

While we wait not-so-patiently for Warhammer: Chaos Gate to get our X-COM tactical combat fix, we've always wondered what would happen if Warhammer somehow underwent a bizarre mating ritual with Panzer General. Now, we finally have our wish – and the marriage works very well. Prestige (from Panzer General) converts easily into Glory Points in Rites Of War, and if your victories capture enough headlines, you can build and customise your unit types, weapons, and warrior skills.

The simple turn-based Panzer General system really seems to capture the flow of the Warhammer tabletop game – without you having to pore over endless charts to see what an Eldar using a Psyker spell cast on a Tuesday night will do to an enemy wearing tartan plus-fours.

The campaign features over 70 weapons (all rendered and animated) and two dozen missions, as the Eldar take on the evil Tyranid throughout the explored galaxy, on planetary terrain that covers the gamut from lush forests to ice storms. Multiplay options include head-to-head and co-operative play for up to four players via LAN, IPX or TCP/IP. We're already hooked, and the emperor hasn't even called on us to save the galaxy… yet.

Terry Coleman



Eldars and betters: Turn-based system works well

SEVEN KINGDOMS II

Genre: Real-Time Fantasy
Label: Interactive Magic
Developer: Enlight Software
Due: Summer 99

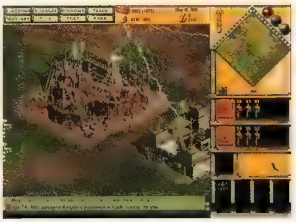
With its refreshing lack of emphasis on combat and its strong focus on economics, construction, espionage, and diplomatic relations, the original Seven Kingdoms was one of the better real-time games of the past year. Now, Enlight Software is hard at work on Seven Kingdoms II.

Quite simply in Seven Kingdoms II there's more of everything. The Carthaginian, Roman, Celtic, and Indian civilisations have been added, as well as new units including cavalry, archers, chariots and elephants.

A roleplaying element has also been added in the form of heroes. These units appear in the course of play and can be carried over from one campaign scenario to the next. Heroes will be able to influence any battle through their own innate skills and their ability to carry powerful artefacts.

The Fryhtans from the first game have returned, with up to 15 new Fryhtans tossed into the mix. In fact, the Fryhtans have a far greater role than they did in the first game. The new game begins with the world overtaken with the monsters. It is up to the player to prevent the enslavement and subjugation of mankind by toppling the Fryhtan rulers, often with the assistance of computer-controlled humans. On the other hand, should you think the Fryhtans are horribly misunderstood, take solace – this time around you'll be able to play as a Fryhtan commander.

Robert Coffey



Terrific weather effects include bolts of lightning

IMPERIALISM II: AGE OF EXPLORATION

Genre: Turn-based historical
Label: Mindscape
Developer: SSI/Frog City
Due: Spring 99

While Imperialism II retains the original's classic style of gameplay, it has changed so much that it is more of a new game than a sequel.

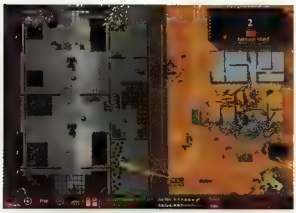
One of the most basic changes becomes apparent on starting the game – fully half of the map is shrouded in black. In order to emphasise the sense of exploration and discovery appropriate to the game's 16th to 19th century setting, everything except the Old World portion of the world map is hidden until you, as ruler of one of the Old World nations, discover and explore it.

Once the New World is discovered, you'll be able to colonise, exploit, and conquer whatever is found there. But you're going to face stiffer competition than in the first Imperialism, thanks to a much tougher computer opponent. Rival computer-controlled countries will recognise threats and ally to defeat you. And while the AI in the original Imperialism fell apart in the later stages of the game, the new version promises to fight you up to the end. It'll also disrupt your trade routes, wrecking your economy, and costing you the game. You'll need all your cunning to win, because Smallpox only occurs in the New World as a 'rare' random event. You'll have to wipe out and otherwise abuse the native population through hard work – Cortez would be proud.

Robert Coffey and Terry Coleman

Tutorials are colourful and informative

AND THE LATEST ON BIG TITLES RECENTLY PREVIEWED...



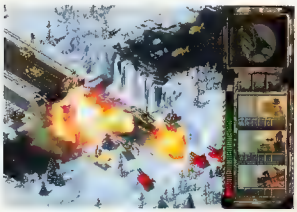
CLOSE COMBAT III: THE RUSSIAN FRONT

Label: Microsoft
Due: March 99

Most of the great board and computer wargames of the past three decades have given the overall strategic or the middle-ground operational view of the Eastern Front. Not so Close Combat III, which gets its hands dirty at grunt level.

What started as an infantry-oriented simulation now handles the vast number of tanks, half-tracks, artillery pieces and other military hardware that took centre stage for much of 1941-45.

If you want to be a small-unit commander, moving up through the ranks of the German or Soviet army, there is nowhere else to be – at least on the PC.



COMMAND & CONQUER: TIBERIAN SUN

Label: Westwood
Due: Summer 99

Command & Conquer will return in the new year sporting 16-bit graphics, 3D landscapes and a multitude of new units and weapons. Time has moved on and the planet's saviour, Tiberium, has become the earth's transgressor, turning it from a fertile hospitable place into a poisoned chalice planet. Mankind has had to retreat underground or to the polar ice-caps, where Tiberium finds it difficult to colonise – but despite the difficulties the Global Defence Initiative and the Brotherhood of NOD are still at each other's throats. There have been imitators and innovators in the real-time genre since the last C&C game, but this will be *the* one to watch out for.

TOTAL ANNIHILATION: KINGDOMS

Label: GT Interactive
Due: March 1999

Cavedog's real-time strategy game with a medieval fantasy setting has little in common with its predecessor Total Annihilation. Gone are the legions of machines led by powerful nine-metre-tall robotic commanders – instead Kingdoms' units range from lowly foot soldiers through to powerful mages, dragons and huge men-o'-war. What's more, there are four sides apiece, each of which varies significantly in form and function – much more so than the simple Core vs ARM sides of TA.

The good news is that Cavedog's programming and artistic talents are being brought to bear with the same powerful pathing controls. New features include full and proper 3D hardware acceleration.

Kingdoms also takes a brave step by doing away with resource management – players have to balance the use of magical Mana instead. Net result – we're looking forward to Kingdoms!

MYTH II: SOULBLIGHTER

Label: GT Interactive
Due: Late December

Tactical fantasy combat entered the gloriously rendered world of 3D with Myth: The Fallen Lords, and the shake-up of 2D strategy games looks set to continue with Myth II. More detailed terrain and extra frames in the animations look set to provide an even more immersive environment. Built-in terrain and mission editors will allow extensive customisation of the game world, making it a real dream for level lords.

STAR WARS: FORCE COMMANDER

Label: LucasArts
Due: February 99

The long-anticipated real-time strategy game based on the *Star Wars* universe. Whether the delay in its development has anything to do with holding back for the first of the new series of *Star Wars* films or genuine development reasons is anyone's guess, but it promises to be a major release. It's a classic resource management, build and combat game played as either the Empire or the Rebellion. There will be over 100 individual units from aerial speeders to AT-AT walkers. Missions will take place throughout the *Star Wars* universe in places like the swamps of Yavin 4 and the deserts of Tattoine.

If diamonds are a girl's best friend, then surely miniature electronic gadgets are a bloke's? They certainly cost as much. Or do they? Technology gets cheaper, and although a year ago digital kit cost an arm and a leg, this Christmas it's a lot more within reach. So here's a choice seasonal selection of sexy, shiny digital toys available at a store near you...

WONDERSTUFF

World's Sexiest PC

SONY VAIO 505

Sony attempts to work the same magic that made the Walkman and Discman household names with the portable PC market. And succeeds – though the price is pretty steep. The VAIO 505 series is top of our list of small objects of desire, being a Pentium 200-266 that is little larger and heavier than a couple of sheets of A4 on a metal clipboard – but a hell of a lot sexier. It's not the ideal gaming PC – it's so slim it needs an external CD-ROM drive as an accessory, but it does feature MMX and D3D compatible processors and 2Mb on-board graphics memory, so full-install games like Links LS can be played very stylishly on the move. And of course for business applications it's perfect. Other optional goodies include a dinky set of clip-on stereo speakers. The VAIO 505's Champagne pink hue isn't the most manly colour in the world for a PC, but that doesn't really matter, this will impress everyone. Size does count – the smaller the better.

£1600+ *From most computer retailers*

PHOTOGRAPHY RICHARD GEEN WORDS ALAN DYER

DVD Player
DVD S315P

VHS video technology has been over the hill for nearly a decade so it's about time we all thought about replacing it with DVD. One of the cheapest and best routes to this new technology is a Sony DVD 315P. It plays DVD video discs, video CD discs and regular music CDs – potentially making it the centre of an impressive home entertainment system. Both video and sound reproduction are fine and it makes good use of DVD's ability to be paused with perfect frozen images. It's fairly easy to use too. But the number of films available to us is restricted by Zoning. Europe is in Zone 2, the USA in Zone 1 and the Far East in Zone 3. Zone 1 and Zone 3 disks will not work in Zone 2 DVD players. So while the Americans have more films on DVD, we just can't play them. More will become available as more DVD players are adopted in Europe, but surely that's a bit like putting the cart before the horse?

£499 Comet

Digital Camera
KONICA QM-100V

The Konica QM-100V isn't the most compact digital camera, but it manages to combine picture quality and favourable price rather well. While a 2x digital zoom is a limiting factor, there is no doubting the usability of the highest 1152x872 image resolution, while even lower resolutions have a sharpness to them that is lacking in most other digital cameras at this price. In fact it won an Editor's Choice award in our sister publication, *PC Magazine*, several months ago. Connection to a PC and downloading picture files is simple and fast. It also uses compact flash cards – making it a boon for PDA owners with flash slots, enabling them to email JPEG files with ease. And the batteries seem to last for ever too – even with flash operation.

£499 Most electronics/camera retailers

Digital Video Camcorder

SONY CCD-CR1 RUVI

The Sony RUVI is so small and looks so like a regular camera that no one need ever know you are actually carrying a VCR. It differs from most other digital video cameras in that it doesn't use a standard digital video cassette. Instead it uses a miniature hard drive cartridge that avoids the necessity of complex record/play facilities, replacing them with a simple solid-state interface. This has many advantages in terms of size and weight, although few in terms of recording time – half an hour compared with a digital video cassette's hour and a half. As such it's likely to be ideal for recording family occasions close to home, but of limited use on holidays when it's not possible to transfer the video to a home recorder. Separate video cartridges are available to extend recording time, but they are more expensive than regular cassettes.

Apart from its size and anonymity the RUVI's other advantage is simplicity – a technophobic granny could operate it with ease. Although it has a 2.5-inch LCD, the quality is not great and the display is dark. Even through a TV the image quality does not match, say the JVC DV3 and filming in low light conditions leads to poor results. But in most conditions it works well enough.

£599 Comet

Personal Minidisk Player/Recorder

SHARP MD-MS 702

MiniDisk appears to be gaining popularity at last, with player and recorder prices tumbling in the last year or so. This is an example of a relatively inexpensive unit that both plays and records very well. It is little larger than a minidisk itself, but it has full digital recording facilities with standard stereo jack and optical line-in, recording level setting and LCD labelling for both disk and songs. Limited editing is possible, including mixing and inserting tracks. A nifty remote control with backlighting and plenty of controls completes an impressive features list. On-deck bass reproduction isn't the best we've heard, but for a complete package it's hard to beat. If you're still not convinced about MiniDisk, this little piece of kit could change your mind.

£249.99 Comet

Digital Video Camcorder

JVC GR DV3

Apart from the lack of a large LCD you'd never guess this is JVC's cheapest compact digital video camera. It's light enough to carry around all day, with both battery and digital video cassette installed. The DV3 has a 10x optical zoom and a lunatic 100x digital zoom that works well enough as long as you use a tripod (for smaller zooms a built-in digital stabiliser does the job well). Images are sharp in both video and still modes and on-board editing features include a decent variety of fades and wipes. Disadvantages? There are a few – the viewfinder display is high resolution and clear but absolutely tiny and there is no on-board speaker, so there will be no quality moments reliving the day behind you in the hotel. But you'd have to spend another £400 at least on the DV3's bigger brother, the DVM5 to get these facilities at this level of quality and size.

£899 Comet

Mobile Music

ROSS RF CORDLESS SPEAKERS

Movable music rather than music on the move, this setup from Ross allows you to place a pair of reasonably powerful speakers within 200 metres of your stereo and still bang out volume to your heart's content. There are two components: a transmitter that plugs into the back of your stereo (or the headphone jack) and either one or two speakers. Speakers have a switch on the back to configure them as either mono, left or right outputs, and there are also frequency and volume knobs. The speakers are powered by immensely heavy rechargeable batteries. Sound quality is impressive for a cordless setup, but interference sources such as mobile phones can mar your enjoyment with the odd buzz and crackle. You could use them as surround-sound system compon— avoiding wires trailing everywhere.

£99.99 single, £179.98 pair Comet

Digital Camera

CANON POWERSHOT A5

Small, neat and powerful, the Canon Powershot A5 looks similar to Canon's IXUS range of APS cameras but is in fact slightly larger than the standard IXUS. It shares the same polished metal build though and looks and feels as though it could survive in a battle zone. Picture quality is very high, especially indoors or in lower light conditions, where the flash is used. Maximum resolution is 1024x768. The LCD on the rear of the camera is very good indeed giving a large and clear picture on its 2-inch SVGA screen and Canon doesn't mess around with memory either. Like the Konica QM100 the A5 uses compact flash cards.

£499 Most electronics/camera retailers

We're searching for the purest love. Surely all men and women can come together as a family? Yes, we can live without the violence and war. We can learn to live in peace with all our brothers and sisters.
Suck on this!
WARGASM
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SoftwareForPCs.com

THAT KRONDOR MOMENT

Raymond E Feist is one of the most popular fantasy writers living today, with 13 titles under his belt and more than 12 million sales worldwide between them. His best-known novels are set in the magical world of Midkemia. From the first novels (the *Rift War Trilogy*) to the most recent four-book epic (the *Serpent War Saga*), they span several generations of characters and all manner of perilous adventures.

Feist: Heavily involved

These books were the inspiration for Sierra's roleplaying game Betrayal At Krondor and they're about to spawn a sequel, Return To Krondor. Feist has been heavily involved with Return To Krondor as a consultant, and is so enthusiastic about it that he has written a fresh trilogy based on the games: *Krondor: The Betrayal*, *Murder in Krondor* and *Return to Krondor*, the first of which will soon be published in the UK in hardback.

Asked what is the chief difference between writing books and creating games, he quips, 'I never had to write subplots in a separate file and worry about where to drop them in.'

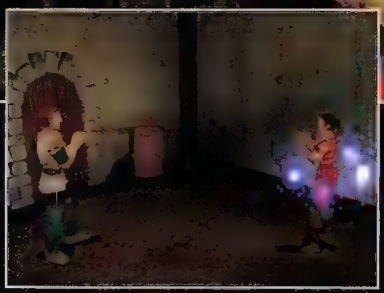
Of course, novels are linear, games are anything but, and all the player's possible decisions have to be scripted into the game. As producer Sinjin Bain puts it, 'We provide the environment for you to write the story yourself.'

Too much freedom, however, is not always a good thing and to keep the player focused, there are certain things that must be achieved so that you can progress. Harking back to its literary origins, Return To Krondor has been divided into 10 chapters and each has a specific goal that must be accomplished before you can move on the next. There are also a number of optional tasks which are not entirely necessary to the plot, but will be of benefit should the player choose to complete them – and extensive playtesting has shown that gamers really enjoy exploring all the options.

'What surprised us,' says Feist, 'was that after answering questions online, people started playing it multiple times to go back and see what they'd missed previously.'

This is something he takes great delight in. Of the game, he says, 'You really want them to like it enough that the idea of returning to it isn't alien to them.'

Krondor's versatile game engine puts you right in the thick of the action. Different viewpoints reveal the locations in considerable detail, or place you in the midst of combat



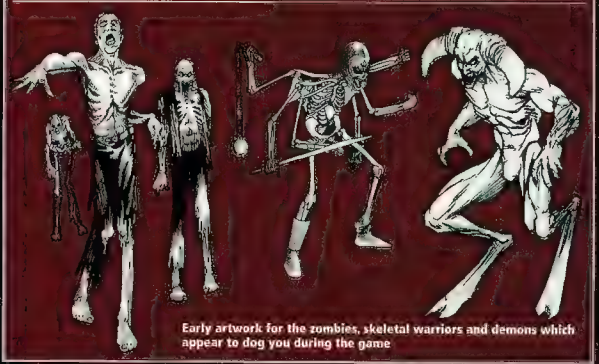
So what was the most interesting part of working on a computer game?

'Collaboration,' says Feist.

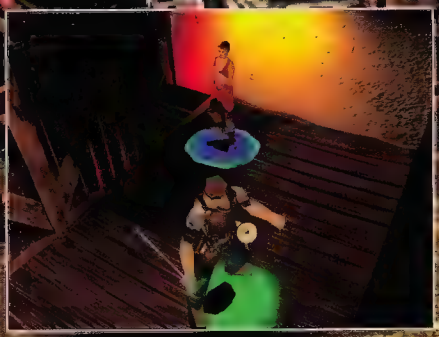
This, as it happens, is nothing new to him. As he freely admits, the world of Midkemia is not entirely of his own devising: 'Midkemia was itself a collaboration between me and my college friends, back when we were playing it as a pen-and-paper roleplaying game on a map made up of hexes.'

However, the transformation of Midkemia from private game to popular fiction is something Feist has been almost entirely responsible for. Still, he is remarkably unprecious about his work. 'It's interesting to see what someone can bring into the mix,' he says. Talking about the artist's interpretation of Krondor's best-known landmarks, Feist says, 'I love seeing junk that's so much better than the stuff I could imagine. It's easy to be

FIENDS AND FOES



Early artwork for the zombies, skeletal warriors and demons which appear to dog you during the game



Feist has a high opinion of the view of Krondor... [illegible] "junk" ...'s so much better ...e stuff you ... imagine'

proprietary about your work, but if someone comes up with a better idea or image, I won't just encourage them to use it – I'm going to steal it.'

While Feist has consulted throughout the game's development and is a regular playtester, he is not responsible for writing any of the dialogue. He doesn't seem to mind this at all, saying, 'I'm not insecure about my work – I don't take myself seriously.'

But while he may not take himself seriously, he is very serious about creating a good product. 'I'm committed to the idea that anything that has my name on it is going to be fun,' he says. 'I'm building a game that I want to play.'

One of the most interesting things about Return to Krondor is that two of its chief characters, James (aka Jimmy the Hand) and magician's son William Con Doin, are also central to the books.

James first appeared as a boy thief in Feist's Rift War trilogy, where he was elevated to the nobility after helping Prince Arutha foil an evil plot. He returns in the Serpent War Saga, where he has reached late middle-age, as the Duke of Krondor. However, Feist's fans will already know that James and William are already dead in book terms, for both sacrifice themselves for the greater good during the Serpent War Saga. Is it not strange to be resurrecting them again?

'I love James because he's one of the best and one of the most incomplete characters I've created,' Feist admits, for although James' youth and later years are chronicled, his transition from one to the other has never been chronicled until now. Now, thanks to the games and the books that are based upon them, Feist has been given the chance to explore the characters in greater depth.

Did he not feel bad about killing them off, though? 'Unless you're writing about an immortal, characters are finite,' he says. 'They live and then they die. It makes you aware of your own mortality.'

Cal Jones

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  Daughter of the Empire
  Servant of the Empire
  Mistress of the Empire
- **Prince of the Blood**
- **The King's Buccaneer**
- **Serpentwar Saga**
  Shadow of a Dark Queen
  Rise of a Merchant Prince
  Rage of a Demon King
  Shards of a Broken Crown
- **Forthcoming**
  Krondor the Betrayal
  Murder in Krondor
  Return to Krondor

TAKE YOUR PC TO THE MAX

Components that can give your PC the edge

We spend a lot of time at *PC Gaming World* talking about CPUs, graphics cards and their impact on game performance. Certainly the CPU and the 3D accelerator (assuming you play 3D-accelerated games) are the main players in the performance equation. But there are other components to consider, such as sound cards, the Universal Serial Bus (USB) and your hard disk. This month, I'm going to look at how to get the most out of them.

The amount of memory needed to run games is increasing. The games themselves are using more memory as they add more features, more sophisticated AI and increase the amount of game data that needs to be stored in memory. The rule of thumb for most systems these days is that 64Mb is adequate, but 128Mb is better. In fact, some of the RIVA TNT cards will start paging out to hard disk like mad when a game is run if there's 64Mb of RAM or less. In this case, inefficient drivers are generating big automipmaps, which are written out to disk.

ADVERT SEMENT

Memory is also eaten up by the the Accelerated Graphics Port (AGP). Since AGP textures are stored in main memory, some memory in addition to normal game memory is used for AGP data. PCI sound cards also consume memory as they have no onboard RAM, as ISA cards did. And most don't store their MIDI wavetables in a ROM, either. Instead, they store them in system memory. It's partly because the profit on sound cards is so thin that shaving 50 pence off the cost by leaving out the ROM makes a big deal. But it's also because of a currently little used standard called DLS (downloadable samples). In theory, a game developer could develop a custom MIDI patch that would then replace an existing one in the sound card's sample set. This would actually make for more efficient storage. However, no games I can think of use DLS yet. Luckily, most PCI sound cards allow you to specify how large the sample set stored in main memory should be. If you really want to be efficient, though, get one of the PCI cards that can still accept a MIDI daughtercard, like the Yamaha SW50XG, which can be had very cheaply these days.

Then there's the mystery of games that have run without any problems but which start to run as slow as molasses in the depths of winter in the Outer Hebrides. Sometimes they crash, conjuring up the unwelcome idea of having to reinstall Windows again. But then again, perhaps not. When is the last time you defragged your hard drive? Or removed extraneous files?

Defragmenting your hard drives when they go over about four or five per cent fragmentation can speed up disk performance by a startling amount. What's more amazing is that sometimes a game will begin running in a more stable manner when the disk has been defragged. Some games create temporary files on the hard drive, then use them during the course of game play. Having a huge, uninterrupted expanse of disk space is much more efficient than having to use little nooks and crannies.

Windows 98 comes with a nifty tool called Disk Cleanup. It will automatically remove temporary files. It also pops up a small, Explorer-like utility to help you wade through files that may be extraneous, but which require a human to make the decision to keep or delete.

I received email from one reader extolling the efficiency of USB mice. Apparently, a Windows 98 system will sample a USB mouse at a faster rate. This reader suggested he got a faster frame rate and smoother performance in Quake II with a USB mouse. As it turns out, Quake II actually runs slightly slower with a USB mouse – at least on my reference rig. The difference is only about one or two frames per second, but is consistently measurable. But things can appear smoother with the USB mouse as you play, particularly in areas crowded with artificial or human opponents. The higher sampling rate results in smoother panning and mouse-look, so sacrificing a couple of frames per second is actually beneficial if your machine's already giving optimum performance.

CH Products sent me the USB version of the F-16 Combat Stick. I discovered there was no difference in Quake II frame rate with the analogue stick compared with the USB version. However, the ana-

logue stick was plugged into a PCI audio card -- the game ports on these cards are often more efficient than those on older ISA sound cards. The cool thing, though, was how the stick self-configured when plugged into the USB port.

It's been something of a truism that PCI audio cards are more efficient than ISA sound cards. 'Efficient' is something of a relative term. Most PCI audio cards attempt to do more than ISA sound cards – 3D positional audio, as an example. But it's a myth that all PCI sound cards are CPU efficient.

We now have a tool that helps us measure 3D audio card performance. The folks at the Ziff-Davis Benchmark Operation have recently released Audio Winbench 99. Audio Winbench plays back a sound file, using multiple simultaneous channels (up to 32). It does this for both DirectSound and DirectSound 3D. I took a look at 22KHz, 8-bit audio, which is pretty characteristic of the sound used in many games. The results were pretty startling.

In the 16 channel test, the Turtle Beach Montego ate up 30 per cent of the CPU in the DirectSound 3D test! So when you're playing a game with 3D positional audio, as much as one-third of your CPU horsepower is used by audio. Diamond's Sonic Impact S70, which uses the ESS Maestro 2 chip, sucks up nearly 14 per cent of the CPU. The Sound Blaster Live looks to be the most efficient, at under 3.5 per cent. The Monster Sound MX300 (Vortex2) results are to be taken with a grain of salt, as we were running beta drivers. While CPU utilisation in excess of 10 per cent is a lot better than the original Vortex, the nearly 12 per cent number is a little worrying.

Of course, by far the worst is the Altec Lansing ADA 70 USB speakers used without a sound card. None of the DirectSound streams are hardware accelerated. The result is 35-plus per cent CPU use in DirectSound3D. So while USB speakers work fine, you might still want a sound card.

How this all translates into frame rate is an open question. What often happens in a game – particularly if you scale up the resolution – is that the sound begins to stutter and fail, rather than the frame rate tanking. Forsaken and Incoming, which use positional audio, show some frame rate degradation when running on sound card which makes high demands on the CPU.

Now, I've been spoiled on the performance side of things. My production PC is a 350MHz Pentium II, and my game rig is a 450MHz system. But recently I booted up Trespasser and was shocked to see how sluggish it was. It just reinforces my view that CPUs and 3D cards are not good enough – yet. Whatever you may think of Trespasser as a game, it's something of a harbinger of the future. Every little performance-enhancing trick will become important once again.

One last point: the dynamic range in performance between the low-end and the high end will only get wider. Low-end systems in the future will likely ship with 'soft' audio and moderately powered 3D accelerators, while high performance (and high-priced) gaming rigs will come tricked out with the latest 3D hardware and PCI audio gear. So if you are budget constrained (as most of us are), you need to be careful about your hardware choices. Just a few pounds more may make the difference between playable and unplayable frame rates, and whether your PC can handle Unreal as against Myst.

Loyd Case

NEXT MONTH

September 1999. As the Jubilee Line extension inches towards the Millennium Dome, games publishers the world over are rushing their plans for the last year of the 20th Century. And a great year it's going to be too. Due to the scourge of the games biz – slippage – there's a clutch of excellent gaming experiences heading towards the pike just a couple of months from now. Great games like Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri (previewed this month) – the closest thing you are going to see to a sequel to the awesome Civilization II.

There's SimCity 3000 – a long time in the begetting, perhaps, but now almost with us. Championship Manager 3, Diablo II, Prince Of Persia 3D, Star Wars X-Wing Alliance – all great stuff. Age Of Empires II, Total Annihilation: Kingdoms and Duke Nukem Forever, even. 1999: the best year ever for PC gaming. Sure looks like it. Stick with us and we'll bring you the best previews and development features, and the most authoritative independent reviewing – all brought to you as it happens as the big titles are revealed. You wouldn't want to miss it!

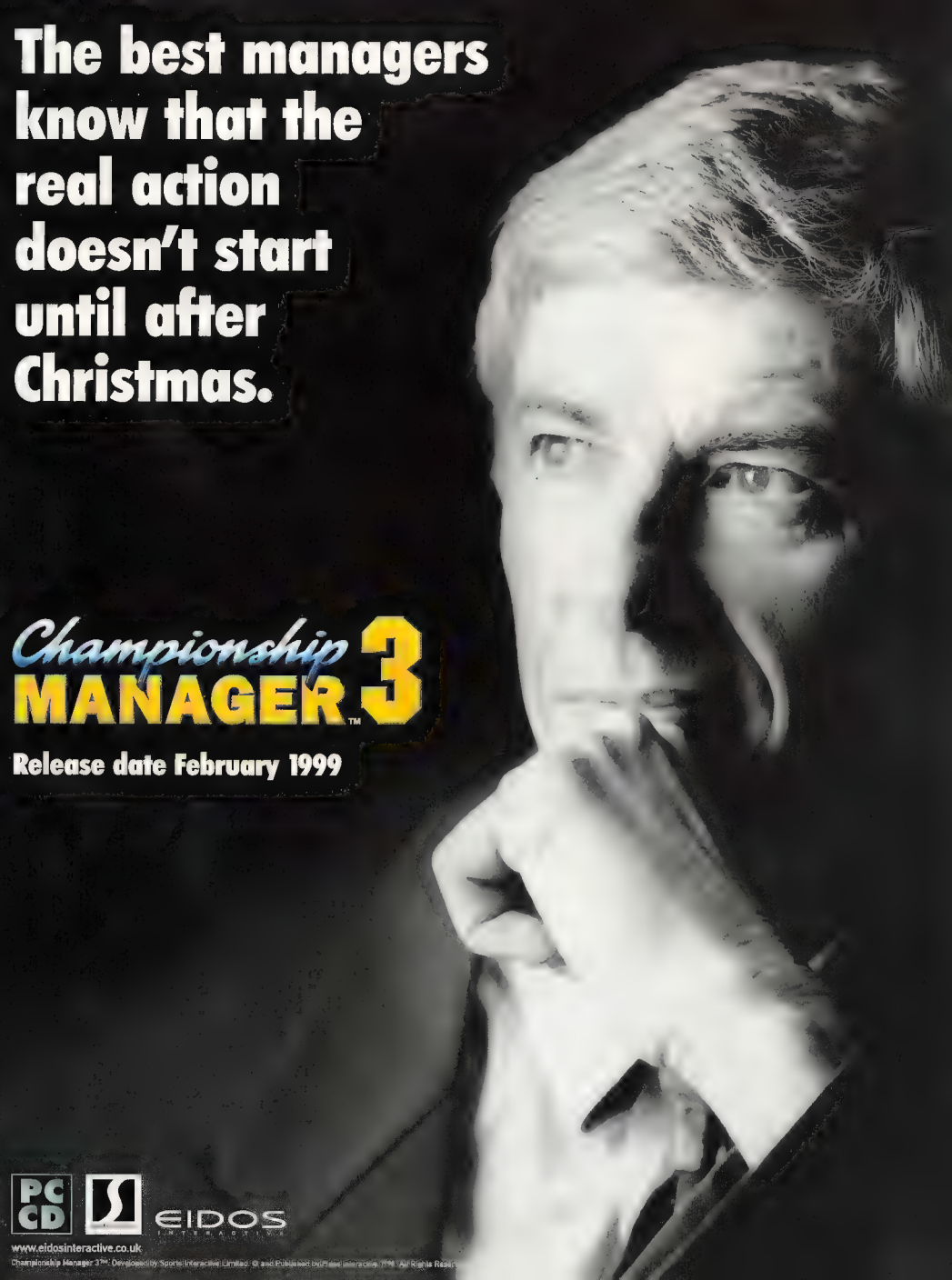
Every new game reviewed and rated ● Distinctively styled and actually rather fact-packed ● Featuring two great free CDs!

PC GAMING WORLD

Issue 26

On sale: 28 January

The most game reviews. The most new demos. Our advice would be to buy it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IT'S YOUR

Multiplayer gaming can either lend a new lease on life to existing games or, in the case of Quake II, provide the centre of attraction from the start. However it's one thing playing on several networked PCs in a room and quite another over the Internet. Over the Internet there's no shortage of game players but the experience can seem hollow – like playing a smart AI in a single-player game. It's difficult to grasp that sitting elsewhere, there's a real human being rolling tanks over your infantry. What we need is the personal touch.

Enter voice communications. It's not new, but in the past the technical difficulties of simultaneous voice communication combined with multiplayer gaming prohibited widespread usage. Now there's a new shareware application called Battlefield Communicator that allows speech over a LAN or the Internet and will work with most multiplayer games.

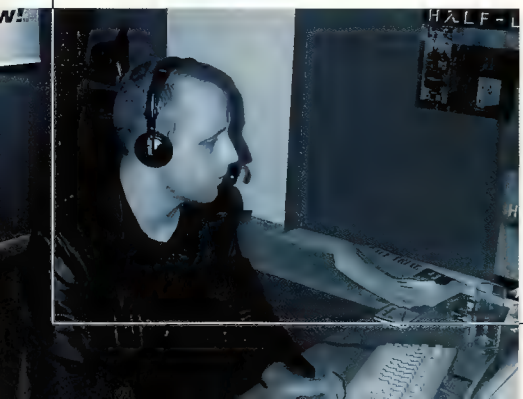
Imagine playing Red Alert and distracting your enemy by voice as you sneak that squadron of tanks around the side. Imagine the screams of microphone overloading exultation if Quake II players could hear themselves. Then think about the teamplay possibilities when your team can talk to co-ordinate an effective raid on the enemy base.

Speech in gaming is an emotional, personal and altogether wonderful thing. It can also be implemented relatively easily but the key to using Battlefield Communicator successfully requires a little more explanation.

● **You will find the shareware version of Battlefield Communicator – both client and server versions – on this month's free CDs**

WHAT DO I NEED?

As well as a copy of Battlefield Communicator you'll need DirectX 6, a full duplex sound card, microphone and headphones. You may have much of this already and if not, the components are remarkably inexpensive. Let's look at each of the elements in turn



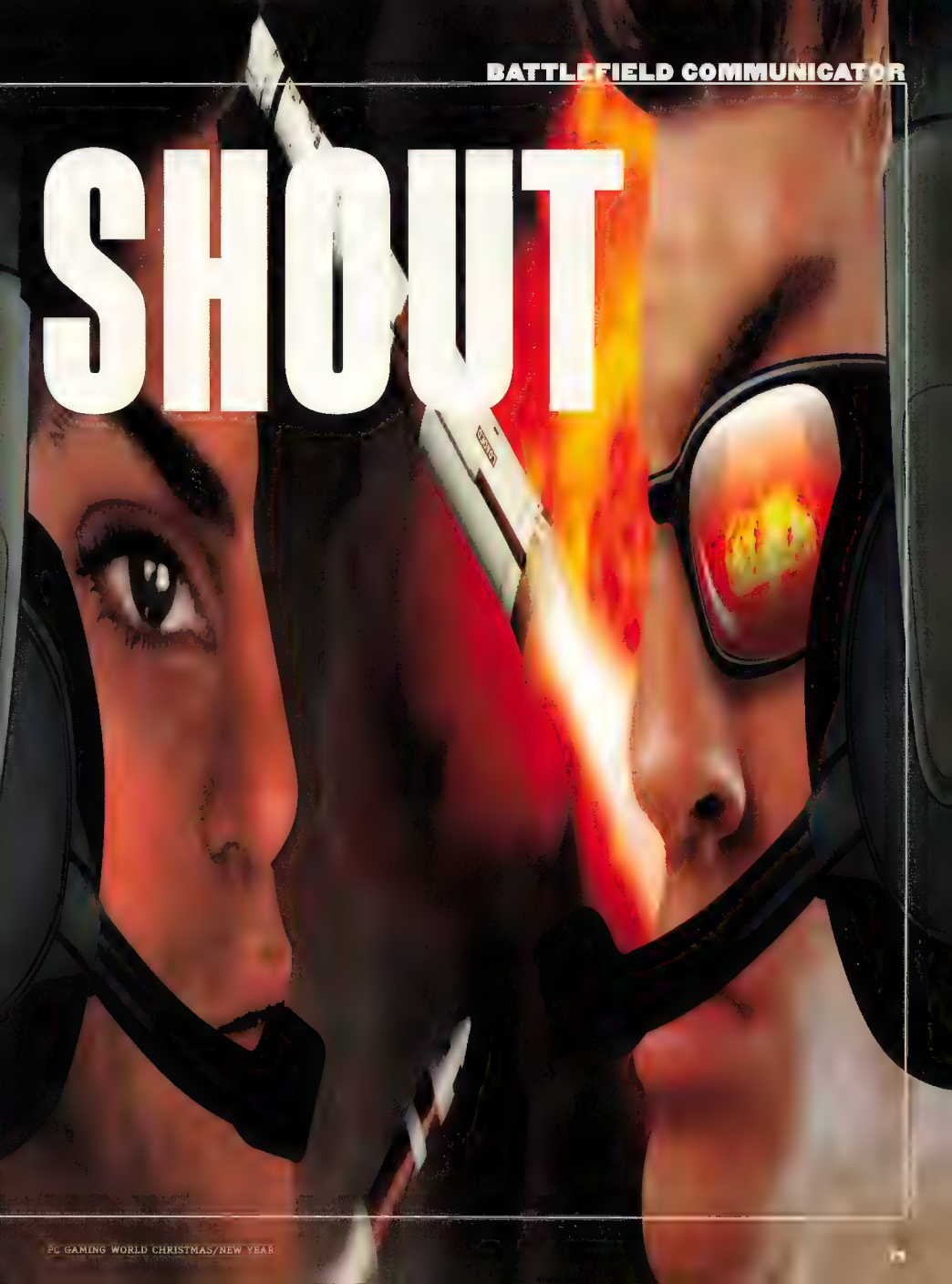
DIRECTX 6

Microsoft's latest multimedia software system is a free add-on for Win95 and Win98. It doesn't work on Win3.1 and Win NT but for most gamers that's a moot point. You can find the Win95 and Win98 versions of DirectX 6 on our cover CD. Battlefield Communicator relies on the enhancements in the DirectSound part of DirectX 6 in order to function correctly.

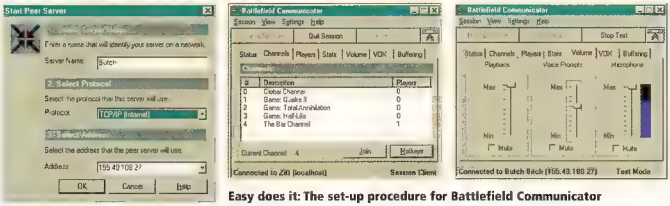
FULL DUPLEX SOUND CARD

Full Duplex means that your sound card should be capable of recording and playing back at the same time. Most modern sound cards, such as any of the

SHOUT



WHAT DO I NEED? CONTINUED



Easy does it: The set-up procedure for Battlefield Communicator

SoundBlaster range and most new PCI sound cards, are full duplex. But some full duplex cards have driver problems to do with the way in which Battlefield Communicator attempts to share the DirectSound playback system with the game, so you can hear other players speak over the top of the game effects.

MICROPHONE/ HEADSET

The microphone is the trickiest thing to set up properly. A regular cheap microphone such as the Creative Labs stick microphone bundled with the SoundBlaster Live or available separately for about £10 will work OK. However these kinds of microphones tend to pick up every sound in the room including key tapping and so on, so they're not ideal for Battlefield Communicator, which transmits on the sound of your voice. The people you're playing with really don't want to hear your spouse complaining about the size of the phone bill.

By far and away the better option is a headphone/microphone combination headset. Most electronics stores have these such as Dixons and Tandy. Labtec has an excellent range – from the wonderful fully enclosed C-370s for around £50 to the lighter and competent LVA-7550s for about £30.

Thankfully the latest version of Battlefield Communicator also supports 'push to talk', which means you don't need to rely on reliable voice activation to use it effectively. In this mode any old cheap microphone will suffice.

SETTING IT UP

There's both client and server Battlefield Communicator on this month's CD. The client is what everyone wants to install. The server is used as a dedicated program if more than two people need to talk. More on that later. After installing the client, running it for the first time pops up a nice configuration wizard.

The default options should suffice on the first page where you're being asked for devices to use. The next stage is the vital full duplex test. If your sound card fails this test then it is unfortunately incompatible. It might be a good time to look into a modern surround-sound card such as a cheap Diamond Sonic Impact S90 or even Sound Blaster Live Value Edition.

Proceed through the recording level test and check that your microphone is being recorded. If it isn't, open your Windows volume control sound panel. Select options/properties. Click the 'recording' button under 'Adjust volume for' and make sure your microphone has a checkbox underneath it and the volume is raised to the top. It's not a good idea for you to hear your microphone through your speakers/headphones either because of feedback. So in the playback volume controls, make sure the microphone mute checkbox is ticked.

On the next configuration wizard page, drag the message volume sliders down to about half or two-thirds so that they don't annoy in the middle of a game as players join and leave the channel. On the next page select a name for yourself and then TCP/IP for Internet use or if you use TCP/IP over a LAN. The next page asks for your type of connection for speed. Use GSM compression system for good audio quality on a LAN.

Battlefield Communicator should now be set up. Time to give it a quick test. Press the 'run test' button on the interface. If all is well, when you speak, you should hear your voice come back a second later. Now you can set the microphone level. Click on the Vox panel. The status is shown at the bottom and there's a slider for the sensitivity of the voice system. The key here is to set it up so that it only transmits when you are speaking. Adjust this level so that you can hear yourself OK and the transmission cuts off when you're not speaking.

BATTLEFIELD AT THE PLAYING FIELDS

An excellent example of the voice-assisted gaming can be found at The Playing Fields, a London-based gaming venue. Each of its 20 machines are equipped with headsets and Battlefield Communicator has been recruited to drive them. In practice, sitting next to someone in a two-machine cubbyhole using BC was pointless since you could hear your partner anyway. However when sitting in different locations or with a team consisting of more than two people, the effect was profound.

We put Battlefield Communicator to the test in a two on two game of Quake II. The result was absolutely mind blowing. Both players knew where the other was, what weapons were covered, and location of enemies and so on. Yelling into the headset for backup and then complaining bitterly when it doesn't arrive in time was all part of the entertainment.

The Playing Fields has novel plans for the channels feature in Battlefield Communicator. In the future it will be possible to hit a key and switch channel to the Bar, place your drinks order in mid game and then switch back to

You should also adjust your microphone placement so that breathing noise isn't picked up. Headset microphones should not be placed directly in front of the mouth as you might think, they should actually be placed to the side. Experiment and you'll find the best position. It might seem silly, but try yelling and getting excited too – you might find that it distorts badly in which case you should lower the recording volume.

If you can't ensure that voice activation will work correctly, consider using 'push to talk'. To use this, select this option on the same VOX page, press the hotkey button and then press the button you want to use to transmit. Try to find a key that isn't used in the games you want to play.

LET'S HOOK UP

Cancel the test and press the Host a Session button. If you do this after you've connected to the Internet, for example, the IP address listed should be the one your provider has assigned. If it looks like the address used on your local LAN then use the drop-down gadget to select the Internet IP address instead. All that remains is to get your counterpart to press the Join a Session button and enter your IP address into their client. You should find that individual clients will work perfectly over a modem for any game with a minimum of extra lag – Quake II in particular seems only affected when you are talking, rather than incoming messages.

If you want more than one player connected, then you will need to install the dedicated server, although this will use much more bandwidth for the person running it so their game may we be lagged. Get that guy with ISDN to host the server if you can. Run this application and then host a session, the settings should be self-explanatory. Now run your client also and connect to your local machine, it should say 'localhost'. Now you may get many other players via a LAN or the Internet to join your dedicated server. Notice that the channel facility on the client becomes active so that you can form extra channels and have separate players in those channels – ideal for teamplay games!

Mat Bettinson

your game channel. It might sound bizarre but remarkably easy to set up, a PC at the bar permanently in the Bar channel is all that's required!

The Playing Fields is an authorised reseller of Battlefield Communicator licence codes – it has Labtec headsets too. To obtain more details you can call 0171 383 5850 or visit its Web site at http://www.theplayingfields.co.uk

ORDERING THE FULL VERSION OF BATTLEFIELD COMMUNICATOR

On the Internet

Easy, just visit the developer's Web site at http://www.shadowfactor.com and register quickly and easily online with a credit card. The licence code is promptly emailed to you on the spot. Isn't the Net great?

Regular mail

Send a Money Order for US$24.95 to:

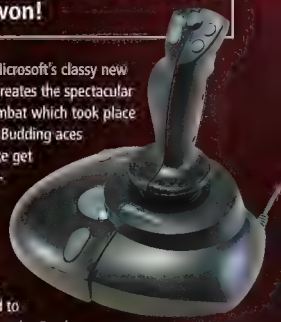
Shadowfactor Software Inc
220 Portsmouth Gate
Waterloo, Ontario
N2T 2H9
Canada

They will send back a licence code by post that will fully activate the software

COMPETITION

SPECTACULAR FLIGHT COMBO TO WIN!

Combat Flight Simulator and Microsoft Sidewinder Force Feedback Joystick PLUS five further copies of Combat Flight Simulator must be won!



Combat Flight Simulator is Microsoft's classy new aviator with guns which recreates the spectacular and often intense aerial combat which took place over Europe from 1940-45. Budding aces and Flight Sim veterans alike get their first real chance to get hands-on experience of some of the most famous fighters of World War II such as the Spitfire, Hurricane and BF-109E. The dog-fighting action is excellent and the rush of extras and add-ons expected to come from enthusiasts are sure to make Combat Flight Simulator one of the most comprehensive World War II flyers ever.

And on this month's CD you'll find The Cobra's Fangs – the first official mission produced by the Combat Flight Sim team.

Now here's a chance to win a first prize of the ultimate flying combination: a Microsoft Force Feedback Joystick and a copy of Combat Flight Simulator, plus five further runners-up prizes of copies of the game

HOW TO ENTER

It's easy, all you have to do is answer the following simple question and return the coupon to: Combat Flight Sim Competition, PC Gaming World, Ziff-Davis, International House, 1 St Katharine's Way, London E1 9UN. If you do not wish to damage your magazine, photo-copies will be accepted. The closing date for the competition is 12 February 1999

1. What was the name of the famous air battle fought between the RAF and the Luftwaffe in 1940?

_____

Now just fill out the details below

Name: _____

Address. _____

Postcode: _____

Daytime telephone number: _____

Email address: _____

From time time to time we may wish to supply you with information or further offers that we think may interest you. If you do not wish to receive information from carefully selected companies, please tick this box [ ]

Competition Rules Winners will be drawn from the correct entries received. Entries must arrive before 13 February 1999. The editor's decision is final. No cash alternative to the prizes will be offered. No correspondence will be entered into. Employees, affiliates or associates of Ziff-Davis, SoftBank or Microsoft are not eligible to enter this competition

RAINBOW SIX

Make those terrorists check out in body bags

HINTS & TIPS

OK, rookies – listen up. In the brutally unforgiving arena of counter-terrorist operations, there are no small mistakes. With the lives of innocent hostages as well as those of your team hanging in the balance, you must execute every move with forethought and precision. To help you rise to the challenge in Rainbow Six, here are some of the fundamental skills and tactics you must master to succeed in both campaign missions and multiplayer battles

Each team member has been trained to keep maximum control over the weapon he is using as he moves, so you can bring it to bear quickly and accurately on targets of opportunity. None the less, there are many ways of improving your chance of hitting. For example, when sniping from afar, kneel down to improve your aim. And when using an M-16 or CAR-15, always use short, one- to three-round bursts. The accuracy of these powerful weapons deteriorates so rapidly on full automatic that longer bursts are a waste of ammunition unless the target is at point-blank range.

GO WITH THE FLOW

How you move also influences the effectiveness of your fire. Stopping, starting, and changing speeds will all temporarily upset your aim. Accuracy does return if you continue the movement, so it pays to glide smoothly out from behind cover – allowing time for your aim to settle before you reveal yourself – when enemies may be present, rather than proceeding a step at a time. If you happen to know an enemy is around the corner, one effective technique is to slice the pie (see box) in one continuous motion, opening up with a burst of automatic weapons fire just before the target comes into view, then walking the reticle onto the target. Only the Heckler & Koch MP5SD5 suppressed submachine gun is controllable enough to do this, however, which gives it a huge advantage over assault rifles in close-range combat.

Avoid running forward or backward when hostiles are liable to pop up. It takes a long time to stop and steady your aim before you can effectively return fire. Running sideways does not have this disadvantage, allowing you to shoot while making at least some attempt to evade return fire. This can be effective in multiplayer combat, but note that AI-controlled Tangos (terrorists) are undeterred by such fancy footwork: they will still gun you down if you don't shoot them first.

Against unarmoured targets (or when using a CAR-15 or M-16, whose 5.56mm rounds can penetrate armour), always aim for the target's centre of mass to maximise the chance of a hit. Head shots are preferred when using light weapons against armoured foes.

Occasionally, you will be fortunate enough to spot the arm or legs of a partly obscured target. Take the shot: damage to those areas can bring down even the best-protected adversary. Make sure you fire off a good long burst, though, since it usually takes several hits to finish the job. Remember that your goal is to incapacitate, not just wound.

PISTOL POWER

Your sidearm generally will not get much use, but do not forget it is there. If caught with an empty clip in the middle of a firefight, you can draw your pistol in a third of the time it takes to reload your primary weapon. The two seconds you save can be decisive. When stealth is not mandatory, keep in mind that

In the firing line: Set up multiple fields of fire before entering a room by freezing team members in place using the Hold command and then moving team leaders to different positions

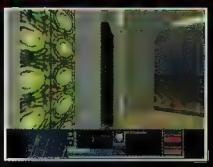
SLICING THE PIE

Entering rooms and rounding corners requires caution as these are the most common preludes to confrontations. Against an alert enemy, the only safe way to do this is by 'slicing the pie'.

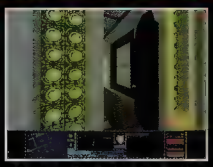
The idea is to sidestep, bringing successive wedge-shaped sections (hence the name) of the room or space beyond a corner into view. By methodically scanning a room from one side to the other in this manner, you can be sure that any enemy that is present will not be able to see you before you see him. Keeping your aim point right at the edge of your cover allows you to react quickly.

It is usually best to do this in one smooth motion to avoid upsetting your aim. Adopting a step-by-step approach, however, can sometimes reveal just a part of your opponent's body allowing you to attack from concealment. Which method is best depends on how far you and your target are from the opening – the greater the distance, the better the step-by-step method becomes.

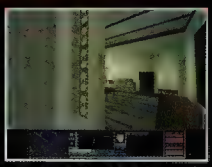
HOW TO SLICE THE PIE FOR A SIMPLE ROOM



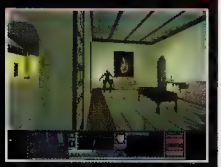
Start out to the left of the door



Sidestep right while rotating left



Keep your sights aimed just inside the doorjamb



Simply pull the trigger to take him down

GUN CONTROL

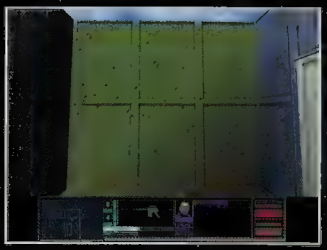
Firearms are modelled with greater realism than in any previous first-person shooter. Taking a peek inside the text files that define their characteristics provides insights into the subtlety of the simulation and the pros and cons of each weapon. The files, which have a pw or sw prefix, are in the Rainbow Six\Data\Kit folder.

The key attributes of each gun are ammo type, magazine size, rate of fire, sniper mode magnification, accuracy, accuracy change with each round fired, and reticle time constant multiplier. Most are self-explanatory, but the last two bear examination.

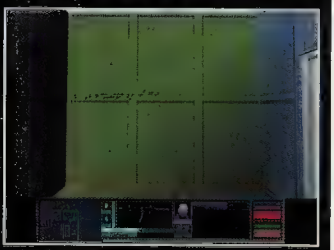
Accuracy change applies mostly to fully automatic weapons: it determines how much the reticle size (probable impact area) grows with each shot in a burst. The larger the number, the faster you lose control when you hold down the trigger. As a graphic example, compare the two images here, each of which depicts the effects of an entire clip being fired while smoothly moving the aim point from left to right. Note that the pattern of bullet holes made by the M-16 shows how its nasty recoil reduces accuracy to nil after only a few rounds. Compare this with the pattern produced by the more manageable MP5SD5 submachine gun.

The reticle time constant multiplier determines the speed with which the reticle size shrinks after you fire or move, reflecting how easy a weapon is to aim. Handguns are best here, with the M-16 and shotgun having the slowest settling reticles.

Consider these factors carefully when selecting your armament. Assault rifles are unmatched for long range single-shot sniping, but in a close-quarters battle when you don't have much time to aim, the extra control of lighter weapons can make all the difference.



See how they gun: Rounds fired by an M-16...



... and from an MP5SD5

silenced pistols are considerably less accurate than their noisier counterparts.

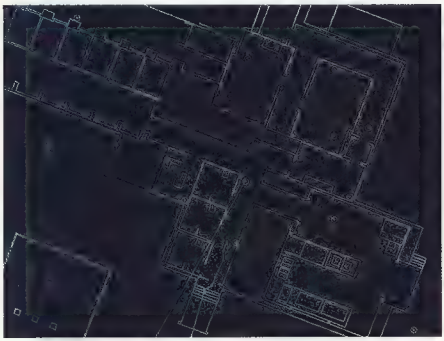
Although somewhat tricky to use, fragmentation grenades and flashbangs (stun grenades) are valuable tools for dealing with hostiles hidden behind cover. In Rainbow Six version 1.02A, each has an effect radius of eight metres, except where blocked by walls. When using them indoors, try to bank grenades off doors or walls so that they bounce safely out of your line of sight before exploding. Just be certain you have a clear opening through which to throw first – having your grenade stopped by a door-jamb so it lands at your feet can ruin your whole day. Assuming all goes well, listen for grunts from the other side of the wall after the boom. If you don't hear any, then either the room was empty or the occupants were out of range.

A fragmentation grenade is

Assigning Go Codes just short of natural stopping points such as doorways and corners allows flexible control of a team's rate of advance. Controlling multiple teams is easiest if you use a unique Go Code for all of a particular team's checkpoints (for example, Go Code ALPHA for all of Blue Team's stops). If you want multiple teams to move out at once, you issue all the appropriate Go Codes simultaneously

usually lethal all by itself. For flashbangs, ready a weapon immediately after the throw and charge in if you hear any grunts. In version 1.00, the amount of time the victims remain stunned depends on their alertness – it can be as short as a half a second. Version 1.02A extends this to three seconds regardless of initial alertness – plenty of time to finish them off. Even if the enemy is too far away to be stunned by the blast, it can still serve as a useful diversion. As the enemy turns toward the sound to see what is going on, you have a chance to move in quickly and take them from the side.

Flashbangs are not commonly used in multiplayer games, which lets you catch many opponents off guard. While the blinding effect only lasts for a moment, shooting accuracy takes seconds to recover. Finish your stunned opponent off from as far away as possible to minimise the chances of getting hit by a lucky return shot. If you see a flashbang tossed toward you, start running immediately. Your hope is that this will spoil your assailant's aim, let you run past to safety before he or she can react, and bring you so close that your shots cannot miss even if you are stunned.



Beater testing: By positioning subordinates equipped with heartbeat monitors at strategic locations you'll obtain up-to-the-minute information on all enemy positions in a building under siege

To make the most of your limited supply of grenades and flashbangs bring along some heartbeat monitors on every mission that does not already provide real-time intelligence on terrorist locations from external sources. Heartbeat monitors are also invaluable for multiplayer combat in urban settings. With a large team, assigning one person to scan ahead for hostiles can be a great force multiplier. Because any contacts the scanner detects also shows up on all other team members' maps, they can concentrate on fighting known enemy positions rather than wasting time clearing every space they cross into in fear of hidden threats. Even if you are on your own, a heartbeat monitor lets you set up devastating ambushes and avoid same. This is particularly true against opponents who choose not to carry monitors. Despite the heartbeat monitor's utility, it cannot see into different storeys, so be extra careful around staircases and ladders.

Aside from heartbeat monitors, the other tools the eggheads in R&D have put in the inventory can generally be dispensed with. The training each team member receives enables any of them to perform lock picking, electronics, or demolition task successfully without special kits – it simply takes a bit longer. Anyone with high skills in those areas will usually get the job done fast enough anyway.

OPENING TIME

Door-breaching charges can sometimes be handy for killing or stunning threats on the other side of a locked door. But either picking the lock and lobbing in a grenade or simply blowing the door up with a grenade can be equally effective. Locked doors can also be shot open by any weapon, not just a shotgun as the manual implies. A shotgun will simply do it the fastest with a mere three blasts (as opposed to 10 blasts for 5.56mm ammo, 12 for .45 calibre and 30 for 9mm).

Use what you have learned, keep your reflexes sharp, and bring those hostages as well as yourselves back in one piece.

SMALL TIPS

ACTION

GLOVER

To activate a cheat or feature, first enter a level and hit Esc to pause the game. Enter the cheat by slowly pressing the camera keys on the keyboard (home=up, delete=left, end=down, pg down=right). After the cheat has been entered, confirmation of the cheat will appear and the game will continue. Sometimes you may experience graphical, progression, or play problems if you use a cheat or combination of cheats.

Action	Sequence
Open portals	Up, right, right, down, left,down, up , right
All cheats off	Down, down, down, down, down, down, down, down
Locate garibs	Left, up, right, down, left, up, left, left
Infinite lives	Up, up, up, up, up, right, down, right
Infinite energy	Right, right, down, right, right, right, up, left
Powerball	Up, down, up, down, up, down, left, up
Control ball	Left, right, left, right, up, down, right, right
Enemy ball	Left, down, up, right, left, eft, down, down
Low gravity	Left, left, up, left, right, up. up, up
Big ball	Down, down, up, down, down, left, right, down
Fish eye	Left, right, left, right, left, right, left, right
Camera rotate right	Left, right, up, up, down, right, down, right
Camera rotate left	Right, down, right, down, up, up, right, left
Mad garibs	Down, right, down, up, left, down, left, up
Frog spell	Down, left, down, down, left, down, up, left
Hercules	Down, down, down, left, left, down, right, eft
Speedup	Left, left, right, up, right, left, down, down
Boomerang ball	Right, up, up, up, up, left, left, down
Froggy	Up, right, down, right, up, left, left, up

ADVENTURE & ROLEPLAYING

FINAL FANTASY VII

Welcome to the famous Gold Saucer, where adventurers come from all over Sorpigal to race thoroughbred Chocobo. If you breed a gold Chocobo and ride your steed to victory in the S-class races, you are rewarded with Counter Attack materia. Each Counter Attack entitles the wearer to one potential counterattack in normal combat. So, grabbing a number of these instantly boosts the firepower of your party. Win enough races in the S-class and you'll get a pair of Sprint Shoes, which grant automatic haste in battle.

Worthy heroes should also prove their prowess in the Battle Square, earning battle points to buy Speed Plus and Pre-Emptive materia, Cloud's Omnislash manual, and W-Summon (which allows a character to cast two summon spells per turn). Once you have purchased Omnislash and W-Summon and have killed the Ultimate Weapon, have Cloud learn Omnislash, and equip him with his ultimate weapon and W-Summon. Then enter the Battle Square for a special series of battles. If you win, your prize is the Final Attack materia that lets you cast a connected spell before dying: Attach it to Phoenix or Revive.

When fighting in the Battle Square, be sure that you have Big Guard, White Wind, and some attack spells; spell effects carry over from battle to battle. A Ribbon is very helpful in protecting against most status effects, and you should cast Big Guard early on, then Regen when you become worried about hit points.

Other useful materia to equip are Restore, Counter Attack, HP Absorb and MP Absorb attached to Deathblow or other materia. Steal Mime, HP Plus, MP Plus, and Speed Plus are also helpful if they fit with your fighting style.

STRATEGY & WARGAMING

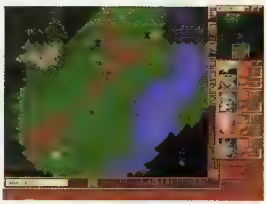
PEOPLE'S GENERAL

Enemy helicopters are a nasty business, so devote some resources to air defence and SAM units. Mobile air defence units are crucial to victory on both sides, and well worth the expense. Once you have enough artillery and air defence, it's time to invest in some choppers yourself.

The replacement rules make it critical that you destroy rather than just damage enemy units. It's generally a good idea to hold one or two units in reserve during your turn to mop up badly hurt enemies that will otherwise appear next turn at full strength. Tanks and helicopters are most useful for this.

STRATEGY & WARGAMING

FIELDS OF FIRE: WAR ALONG THE MOHAWK



Every mission starts at a flag near a white rock – the teleportation gate from the fort map to the mission map. Better save first, because there's no returning if you can't complete the mission!

Make sure you choose a character with a musket or a bow and arrow, since these two weapons can be upgraded four ways – damage, range, accuracy, and reload speed – while others have only a couple of possible improvements.

REVIEWS

HOW DOES THE PCGW REVIEWS RATING SYSTEM WORK?

★★★★★	**Classic.** A rare, near perfect game. The graphics, sound and gameplay together form a Transcendent Gaming Experience! Our strongest buying recommendation
★★★★	**Very Good.** A high-quality game that succeeds in many areas. Still very much worth your money, especially if you are interested in the subject matter or the genre
★★★	**Good.** Generally a good gaming experience. May exhibit minor imperfections, but still a successful development. With flawed innovation or lack of originality. Buy if subject or genre particularly appeal
★★	**Average.** A mixed bag. A game with problems – usually lacking in gameplay or suffering from ill-conceived game design. You should think carefully before buying it
★	**Poor.** The rare game that gets it all wrong. This is reserved for those products so ill-conceived or valueless that you wonder why they were ever released in the first place

HOW DO WE CLASSIFY GAMES?

At PC Gaming World we classify reviews by the following genres. We do this to make navigating the magazine easier and also because we use specialist reviewers for each type of game – to ensure both accuracy and authority of our verdicts.

ACTION: The emphasis is on hand-eye co-ordination and reflexes, usually emphasising fast play or combat over plot or strategy. Arcade-style driving games are also included here. *Begins page* **84**

ADVENTURE AND ROLE PLAYING: Adventures include games where you control an alter ego and move through a storyline or sequence of events, where puzzle-solving takes precedence over combat. Roleplaying games (RPGs) are a sub-set of adventures, but stress character development, often through improving stats or other attributes. *Begins page* **114**

CLASSICS AND PUZZLES: Classics are old standbys and parlour games that appeal to many different types of gamer – examples include backgammon, chess and bridge. Puzzle games emphasise spatial relationships, word games and/or problem-solving – examples would be Zoop and Tetris. *Begins page* **100**

SPORTS: A broad genre that includes all manner of sports titles, including both action-oriented and strategy-based releases. *Begins page* **110**

SIMULATIONS: Highly realistic games from a first-person perspective: you may drive a realistically simulated car, fly an aircraft with a meticulous physics model, or swoop through a detailed science-fiction environment. Usually polygon-filled technology is used to build the simulated world on the fly. *Begins page* **78**

STRATEGY & WARGAMING: Strategy games involve problem-solving and both short- and long-term planning. These titles almost always emphasise resource management and risk assessment – including titles like Master Of Orion or SimCity. Wargames are a sub-set of strategy games which recreate historical conflicts from a command perspective. They may be tactical, operational or strategic – and stress anything from logistics and firepower to leadership. *Begins page* **102**

WHAT IS OUR REVIEWS POLICY?

We review software that is either available to buy or will be available to buy at retail during the shelf life of the magazine issue. We believe the reader is best served by a reviews content that reflects currently releasing titles – and not by so-called exclusive reviews of semi-finished product, set to appear often months after the review's publication. Our policy of reviewing current releases also means that – as far as humanly possible – we will review from the final copy of the game, enabling us to more accurately judge the playability of the boxed shop copy that you will buy.

IMPARTIAL REVIEWS The publishers of PC Gaming World (Dennis Publishing) are recognised the world over for the authority, accuracy and impartiality of their reviews. It is the main plank on which the reputation of ourselves and our other titles are built. It will not be compromised.

ALL GAMES ARE EQUAL AT THE REVIEW START NO favouritism for big-name publishers. The great game is king – whoever develops it. Wherever possible the better the score, the more space will be devoted to a game review.

FINISHED CODE We believe that you should read the experiences of reviewers who have played fully featured Mastered code. We will continue to rank the importance of evaluating the actual game you will buy far above any concerns of striving for an 'exclusive' review.

THE MOST EXPERIENCED TEAM We will continue to develop the most experienced and authoritative panel of reviewers anywhere in the UK. Our current editorial team includes gaming experience averaging over eight years, and extends back as far as the Commodore PET.

VERDICTS We will never trade editorial favouritism or 'a good score' for an exclusive – either on the same product or as part of a package deal for future coverage of any other title or titles. Our verdicts and scores are sacrosanct.

MORE REVIEWS Our mission is to provide games buyers with the most comprehensive and accurate reviews picture of each month's new releases. We will strive to review every new PC game released. A tall promise, perhaps, but we already review more games than anybody else – and we plan to continue and extend that policy.

TIMELY REVIEWS Wherever it is possible – without compromising the need to exhaustively playtest each title – we will strive to coincide publication of a game's review with its retail availability. We do not see any benefit in being first to review a game, four months before anyone can buy it.

SPECIALIST REVIEWERS We will continue to have the most knowledgeable specialist reviewers. We get flight sim fans to review flight sims, Quake fans to review Quake packs.

WHAT DOES THE SYSTEMS REQUIREMENTS BOX DO?

For each review we include systems requirements information detailing the equipment you will need for the game to run efficiently. We recognise that our readers have a wide range of differently specified PCs and we want readers to be aware of the minimum recommended hardware configuration and operating systems for each game to run effectively. We also recognise the increasing importance of network and online multiplayer capabilities.

Age Rating. Shows the age suitability of the program (either ELSPA or BBFC classification)
Installation. Lists the operating systems and the minimum versions required by the game – ie DOS 5.0 or better or Win95
Minimum PC. Shows the minimum processor and processor speed required to run the game successfully – ie 486 66MHz or Pentium 75
Minimum RAM. Indicates the minimum system memory required to run the game
CD. The minimum speed CD required – eg quad speed ***Graphics.*** The graphics modes required – ie VGA or SVGA
Sound. Details the sound cards with which the game can be configured – ie SoundBlaster or Windows compatible
Control. Shows devices available for use to play the game – ie mouse, keyboard, joystick or joypad
Advanced Graphics Support. If it is compatible with any 3D technology – MMX, D3D or other individual native card support?

We take care to ensure that the systems requirements information is accurate to the best of our knowledge at the time of press. However, we cannot be responsible for any loss or damage resulting from any inaccuracies in the information provided.

Europe

Not quite their finest hour

LABEL: MicroProse
TELEPHONE: 01454 893893
WEB: www.microprose.com
DEVELOPER: In house
PRICE: £39.99
NO. OF PLAYERS: 1-8 (2 via serial link, 2-8 via LAN or Internet)
DIFFICULTY: Intermediate
RATING: ELSPA All Ages

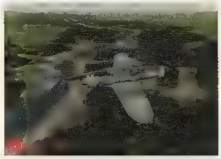
SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

Installation Win95/Win98 **Minimum PC** P166 **Minimum RAM** 32Mb **CD** Quad speed **Graphics** DirectX-compatible **Sound** DirectX-compatibles **Control** Mouse, keyboard, joystick **Advanced Graphics Support** D3D, Glide-compatible

MicroProse's sequel to 1942: Pacific Air War looks as classy in play as it does in its beauteous screen shots. All 20 versions of the 11 classic planes featured in-game in European Air War would have looked good in rendered cut-scenes a couple of years ago. There are novel animated effects too: hit the fire button and smoke puffs back from the gun ports while spent cartridge cases cascade from the wings. The patchwork fieldscapes of 1940s Europe are also among the best I've seen – even if poor old Blighty's flat as a pancake.

Glide and D3D versions are included and if you have a PII 300 the game will even run smoothly in software mode – at least until the action starts.

So far so good. But after the



Admiring the view: The planes and landscapes are simply beautiful

an Air War

Crowded skies. The flak looks pretty but don't get too close

wow factor's worn off, storm clouds soon begin to darken European Air War's picture-perfect skies. With up to 256 planes in the air simultaneously and flak bursts peppering the stratosphere, even my TechWorks Voodoo 2 SLI combo struggled to pedal the polygons at a decent rate.

Compared with I-Magic's Warbirds or Microsoft's Combat Flight Simulator, European Air War's flight models feel woolly and uncommunicative. Some two miles after running out of runway I was still struggling to get airborne in the potent Typhoon. And the famously forgiving Hurricane snapped into vicious spins at the slightest provocation.

Dim-witted AI doesn't help either: when homing in on an American bomber formation in my Messerschmitt 109, the forward elements massacred their own back-markers with friendly fire in an effort to hit me.

After a fix of instant action, three campaigns lie at the core of the game, pitching you into battle as an operational squadron pilot. Historical settings include the Battle of Britain or European theatre in 1943/44 playing one of Churchill's few, a Yank fighter jock or brave Luftwaffe pilot.

Campaigns are basically a collection of about 25 fixed missions. Outcomes do have some bearing on events later on in the war, but player influence is limited to weapon choice and doesn't extend to choosing targets or even editing waypoints. Fortunately a separate mission builder affords you far more control.

European Air War's bountiful eye candy will sell it to many less discerning gamers. But for my money Combat Flight Simulator has the edge on realism, while Jane's slick World War II Fighters beats it hands down for thrill-a-minute action.

Rowan Jackson

PROS: Superbly animated photo-realistic planes and highly detailed landscapes

CONS: Mediocre flight modelling, inferior AI and an uninspiring campaign structure

RELEASE DATE: Out Now

★ ★ ★

Forget your turbos and GTIs – SLI's the way to go for some serious speed

Yeeeha! I'm back in 3D gaming business. A TechWorks Power 3D2 SLI bundle now nestles deep within my system. In plain English I've got a pair of 12Mb Voodoo 2 cards running in tandem. According to the technical guff they take turns in drawing lines on the screen offering a speed advantage of around 90 per cent over a standard Voodoo 2 board while supporting higher resolutions as well. At less than £200, this little number's a godsend to the serious simmer, so I couldn't wait to find out how it would compare with my original 3Dfx Orchid Righteous board.

To do this I decided to test their mettle on a few of my favourite current sims. First up was a mission in my ongoing Total Air War campaign. TAW's always run pretty well on my PII 300 at 640x480 resolution, but it did chug when the screen got particularly busy, for instance, during take-off and landing at busy airbases or swooping low over a large town. With both cards firing on all cylinders I noticed a huge increase in performance before my wheels even left the runway. I can now run the game at crisp 800x600 resolution and still watch rows of parked planes slide smoothly past as I taxi for take-off. And once over the battle zone, even volumetric clouds, huge explosions and marauding enemy fighters have no noticeable effect on the frenetic frame rate.

Thoroughly impressed, I moved on to the notoriously power hungry Grand Prix Legends. Previously, 640x480 with around 10 cars on the track was just about my lot. Now I can hare around Monaco chasing a full grid of 19 cars with the detail levels maxed-out in 800x600. For solo practice sessions I even pushed the envelope to a totally outrageous 1280x1024 without a problem – still didn't help me win a race though!

However, the titles that really lit my burners were NovaLogic's F-16 Multirole Fighter and MiG-29 Fulcrum. Both games specifically detected my SLI setup and rubbed their hands with glee. Running at 1024x768 resolution I stared slack-jawed at virtually photo-realistic external views. From the pilots' perspective, panning up with the virtual cockpit even revealed reflections of the cockpit instruments in the canopy.

As well as well as re-kindling acquaintances with some old flames, I've also managed to allow my souped-up system some quality time with some new releases. As expected, MicroProse's European Air War looks gorgeous and taxed my new additions to their limits. Shame it still left me craving some solid gameplay. Likewise, reviewing Grand Touring reminded me that it takes more than highly polished bodywork to create a classic driving game.

It's clear from this month's mixed bag that joining the latest 3D-card aristocracy doesn't guarantee PC gaming happiness. But take it from a nouveau riche member: if you pick your games carefully, it certainly does help.

Rowan Jackson

Comments or questions on sims? Write to Rowan or email him on pcgw mail@zd.com

Apache Havoc

New kids take the block

LABEL: Empire
TELEPHONE: 0800 783 0156
WEB: www.empireflight.com
DEVELOPER: Razorworks
PRICE: £39.99
NO. OF PLAYERS: 1-8 (2-8 via Internet, LAN, modem, null modem)
DIFFICULTY: Intermediate
AGE RATING: ELSPA All Ages

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

Installation Win95/Win98/Win NT **Minimum PC** P166 **Minimum RAM** 32Mb **CD** Quad-speed **Graphics** DirectX-compatible **Sound** DirectX-compatible **Control** Keyboard, joystick, throttles and rudder pedals **Advanced Graphics Support** 3Dfx, D3D

Taking-off from the Kiev-class carrier, the Hokum is ready to support the amphibious assault

The grip of the Janes group on simulation trophies has finally been loosened by a group of Digital Integration veterans who have decided to go it alone.

Start-up company Razorworks has spent two years building its new game engine to stand it in good stead for the future.

Developing the ultimate helicopter simulation is a multi-faceted problem, and the team has managed to come up with solutions on all fronts. In trying to cater for all tastes, a no-compromise approach has been taken with the flight model, and it feels as responsive and temperamental as any helicopter should.

Effects such as 'rotor cross-coupling' and 'retreating blade stall' make for some lively manoeuvring. The avionics and controls are all there, but there is not an excessive number of commands. To make life easier, automatic co-pilot assistance can be used for finding and identifying targets.

The level of detail on both helicopters is equally excessive – this is certainly not an Apache simulator with a Hokum added at the last minute – the cockpits are impressively accurate. The team have been obsessively collecting information about the Mil-28 and boast possibly the world's most comprehensive collection of intelligence on this ugly beast. They even went to the Paris and Farnborough airshows to pin down the last particulars. A big surprise was how intrusive the windscreen wipers were, so they included them in their models.

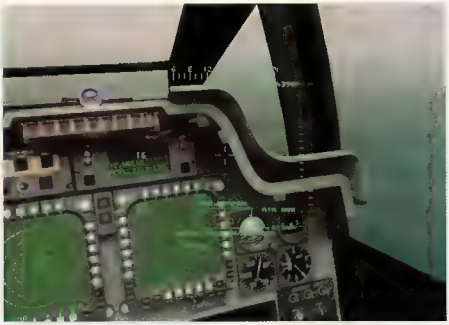
This is just as well, since the weather in a campaign can change dramatically. The maps are huge – 400km by 400km – and so whole weather systems can traverse the area.

Watching the game, the most striking aspect is that it looks far more realistic than previous chopper sims. The team used relatively coarse satellite data as a foundation, and hand-tweaked it to allow them to put in steep faces and vertical river banks, so that the water really does flow downhill. Hedgerows are included to allow helicopters to hop across the open landscape with a little extra cover. A hybrid approach is used to create the trees, with boxes of tree textures for forest areas and individual trees elsewhere. To break up the outline of the boxes, single trees are used around their edges; an effect that looks good both from above and at ground-level

CAMPAIGN COMPANIONS

The war is constantly being waged, with up to 1000 vehicles slugging it out to the bitter end. But don't spend all day viewing the battlefield, as the clock is constantly ticking

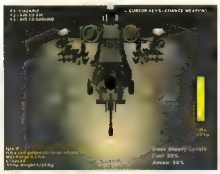
The menacing Longbow Apache, with familiar mast-mounted radar and awesome chain gun



Scan for targets and automatically padlock them or switch between targets with the intelligent virtual cockpit

without murdering the frame rate. Cities, power-lines, bridges and buildings abound too, fully populating the landscape.

The helicopters themselves are exquisitely detailed, with fully articulated components that look utterly realistic. All of the other vehicles are of the same calibre – SAM launchers deploy properly and tank commanders button down when the shells start flying. There are plenty of other aircraft buzzing around too, from A-10s to Yak-141s, and the war rages all around.



A huge effort has gone into a fully dynamic, real-time campaign system of gargantuan proportions, involving 1,000 vehicles in total. There are three campaigns – the Caspian Sea, Cuba and the Golden Triangle – each of which can be played in the Apache or the Havoc.

You are sent to a base in the region (sometimes an aircraft carrier) and can select to fly any Apache or Havoc mission if you are of sufficient rank. As a rookie you are only given straightforward missions to fly – promotion leads to more challenging sorties.

When you arrive at the base, the war is usually just starting. Reconnaissance and scouting missions are the norm at first, with close air support and interdiction missions coming into play once the shooting really starts.

Scream down river valleys to protect yourself, or just to show off

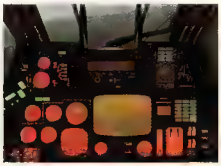
As with Team Apache, the campaign is in real time. The clock is always ticking and other units go about their business as you refuel and decide which missions to take. Initially you are assigned a short tour of duty, but this is extended as missions are successfully completed. You can fly any Apache or Havoc, but failure to come back results in a severe tour of duty time penalty. This makes it harder to complete the campaign, as you will be relieved of duty when your tour is up. Success is based on the ground war and on your side having captured enough land.

This dynamic system is gripping, especially given the time limit. It is possible to hop between helicopters that have already started their missions ensuring a steady stream of action. Single missions actually use the campaign engine, but there is no time limit imposed.

Naturally, Apache Havoc supports multiplayer, and is designed from the ground up with this in mind. The nature of the terrain means that there is massive scope for hide-and-seek among the river valleys and forests, making it a completely different experience to traditional dogfighting. The sequel, Comanche Hokum, will extend the electronic battlefield and enable hunter-killer teams to prowl together.

Apache Havoc is a formidable debut that matches Longbow 2 in every respect, and surpasses it in many. Above all, it manages to be a delight to fly without becoming over-complicated.

Kenji Takeda



PROS: The terrain is so vertical compared with any other flight simulation. Two helicopters, alluring graphics and engrossing dynamic campaigns are just some of the highlights of this beautifully rounded package

CONS: The shaking virtual cockpit of Longbow 2 and lack of a co-pilot/gunner station may be missed by some

RELEASE DATE: Out Now

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Grand Touring

Nice cars, shame about the race

LABEL: Empire
TELEPHONE: 0181 343 9143
WEB: www.empire.co.uk
DEVELOPER: Elite Systems
PRICE: £29.99
NO. OF PLAYERS: 1-8 (2 via serial link, 2-8 via LAN)
DIFFICULTY: Easy
AGE RATING: ELSPA Al, Ages

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

Installation Win 95/Win98 **Minimum PC** P166 **Minimum RAM** 32Mb **CD** Quad speed **Graphics** DirectX compatible 4Mb **Sound** DirectX compatibles **Control** Keyboard, mouse, gamepad, wheel (supports Force Feedback) **Advanced Graphics Support** Direct3D, 3Dfx

Over-enthusiastic overtaking damages your car. Shame you can't see it though

I'm surprised that Grand Tourismo still hasn't made it to the PC. Well-designed tracks, real-world super cars and stunning visuals equip the PlayStation's finest with opiate-like addictive qualities. With a gaping hole in the PC gaming market still waiting to be filled, it comes as no real surprise that Empire's latest rubber burner looks and sounds remarkably similar.

Grand Touring offers a mixture of arcade action and simulation-style racing in eight anonymous (expensive these licences, you know) but thoroughly recognisable sports cars. Budding Schumachers who can't wait for the green light can check out the game's eight imaginary tracks in arcade mode. Pitted against Gladiators style characters – all prone to varying degrees of road rage, it's a coin-op style dash to the next checkpoint constrained by irritatingly stingy time limits.

Reflection effects are especially well done

At the beginning of the game you have access to two cars: a Toyota Celica or James Bond's favourite BMW Z3. To gain access to six other exotic machines, including a McLaren F1, Dodge Viper and Lamborghini Diablo, you must select simulation mode and claim victory in three escalating race categories. This more authentic option allows players to tinker with various aspects of car setup including down-force, tyre choice and suspension settings. You even get a handy but totally unrealistic choice of front, rear or four-wheel-drive.

To get a feel for your motor before race day, four timed courses test skills from simple cone slalom to a complex ballet of handbrake turns. On the move the cars look great, especially when viewed using the comprehensive replay 'suite'. Reflections from your chosen paint scheme highlight the detailed bodywork while realistic tyre smoke and body-roll complete the effect.

Tested on my PII 300 with 3Dfx SLI combo it ran like the wind – but then so it should. But once the lights go green for the race proper, even the silken tones of Mariella Frostrup's commentary can't soften the rough edges of GT's unconvincing handling model. Slamming into the Armco scarcely slows you down at all, but put a single wheel on the grass and you're reduced to a crawl as the opposition streams off into the sunset. Worse still are the disorganised view perspectives. Getting from the default 'above and behind' view to my favourite 'first-person' perspective entails scrolling through a multitude of cinematic viewpoints. And even if you do manage it during a race you have to make do with a simple bonnet cam instead of a proper in-car view.

Grand Touring looks gorgeous and the optional LAN play for up to eight drivers should be a blast. But as a reformed TOCA, Colin McRae Rally… and Grand Tourismo addict, it didn't leave me clucking for another fix.

Rowan Jackson

PROS: Well-designed interface, highly realistic cars and a great replay feature

CONS: Mediocre handling models and illogical view selection spoil the fun

RELEASE DATE: Out Now

★★★

Speed Busters
RADAR ZONE
9/10 Game-online
88% Total Control
"Superb, and a bargain at under thirty quid."
85% PC Zone
GET RICH QUICK -
DRIVE LIKE A MANIAC
www.speedbusters.com
THE GAME WHERE IT PAYS TO SPEED
PC CD-ROM
Ubi Soft

It's been a good year – and next year looks even better

This month I've been doing my bit for that 'special' US-Brit relationship with Chris Roberts' mob Digital Anvil. They're based in Austin, Texas, and they've got some rather tempting games under development for next year. Oh, and some movie or other.

Actually I only have their word for it that we were in Texas at all. There were no cows (besides one that was plainly a sofa), no silly hats and no oil derricks. We ate cardboard pizza and drank in an Irish bar. In fact, the only clearly American nail in my geographical coffin was the sight of an otherwise normally proportioned couple sporting stars 'n' stripes T-shirts and complementary sidewalk-sized buttocks. Pairs of, I mean, in case you're having visions of two people each with one normal sized buttock and one the size of a space-hopper, gradually keeling over… Never mind.

I digress. It's time to round off what has been, by and large, a fine and upstanding year for action games. I was never that struck on Unreal (though plenty were), but we've had some real highlights like Half-Life – game of the year in my book – Wargasm, Klingon Honor Guard, Battlezone, Motocross Madness, Carmageddon II and Forsaken. We've had our tragi-comic lows too. Please, please don't do a sequel – my sides are still hurting too much to cope with the thought of another Deathtrap Dungeon or 'Nam.

To see the year out we have the ever-energetic Lara doing her gravity-defying thing. If you'd prefer something with a lower bimbo-with-guns rating, Thief is an altogether more subtle and intelligent proposition. Heretic II, Speedbusters (B-movie racing silliness) and Future Cop are all great fun, too. SiN, unfortunately, is average and buggy. Its problems are compounded by having to live in the shadow of Half-Life. At least it's not as bad as Trespasser: Lost World, which is proof positive that only dinosaurs can make this big a pile of poop. I get more amusement out of the plastic Godzilla that sits on my PC, and his batteries ran out months ago.

Looking ahead to next year, my clockwork crystal ball suggests that all games will suddenly be re-named to Millennium: Something Or Other. Assuming that isn't the case and a) they continue to pay me my monthly beer tokens and b) the developers are vaguely on schedule (a laughable concept), I should be introducing you to the dribblesome prospect of Duke Nukem Forever!, Prey, Max Payne, Giants, Outcast, Messiah, Rogue Squadron, Daikatana, Loose Cannon and the entire repeat-prescription brigade of favourites: Quake III, Prince of Persia 3D, Blood II, Resident Evil II, and Descent III.

Ladies and gentlemen, Elvis has left the building while there's still time. A Merry bloody Christmas to you all.

John Bennett (aka Elvis Bacon)
Comments or questions on action games? Write to John or email him on elvis_bacon@zd.com

SiN

Activision's big-hope, first-person shooter fails to push the genre forward

LABEL: Activision
TELEPHONE: 01895 456700
WEB: www.activision.com
DEVELOPER: Ritual Entertainment
PRICE: £39.99
NO. OF PLAYERS: 1-16 (2-16 via LAN or Internet)
DIFFICULTY: Intermediate
AGE RATING: ELSPA 15+

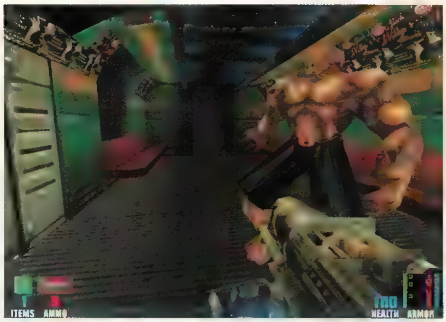
SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
Installation Win95/Win98 **Minimum PC** P166 **Minimum RAM** 32Mb **CD** Quad-speed **Graphics** SVGA **Sound** DirectX compatible **Control** Keyboard, mouse **Advanced Graphics Support** 3Dfx, Rendition, RIVA, PowerVR

The Quake II engine does the job

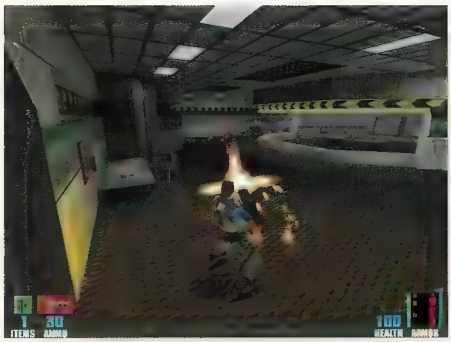
As the year has advanced towards the inevitable Christmas festivities, the two first-person shooters to stick their profiles furthest above the parapet have been Half-Life and SiN.

And though SiN eventually won the race – being the first in the shops – unfortunately, of the two, it's a good deal less entertaining. It's as though it has had a charisma bypass. It doesn't deliver as well on either the gameplay front – it seems lacklustre compared with Half-Life's adrenalin rush – or in the eye candy department. Maybe this is a function of compromises made to get the game out first. Maybe it's just that Half-Life is *so* good that everything else pales beside it. Whatever, SiN disappoints.

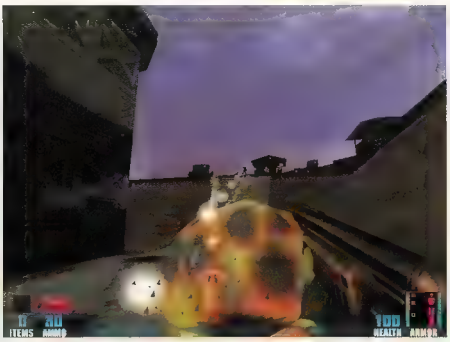
The hero of SiN is Blade, a blue-suited muscleman with dreadlocks and weird glasses. He has a sidekick, too – a hip nerd called JC who provides help by radio while safely sat at base. But most of us know SiN for its bad girl – Elexis Sinclair, the big-busted, red-vinyl-suited evil CEO of Sintek Industries. She's been billed as a kind of invert Lara – her company appears to



The scripted events feel more hollow and predefined than they should



Third-person mode looks quite good with reasonable character animation



Sadly the weapons feel toy-like and largely ineffectual

be in the business of turning out monsters…

And there it is. The first problem with SiN. While the level design does the job admirably, the bad guys are just terrible. The enemy AI is so non-existent that the levels have had to be constructed so the player is inundated with bad-guys, just to push up the tension. That's fine, but I like my enemies more varied and smarter than lobotomised chipmunks. They look the business, but their firing and moving animations are identical for each type, making SiN more of a shoot 'em-up in this respect rather than a convincing first-person shooter.

Third-party characters look like an afterthought. If you press the 'use' key when standing over a cowering 'innocent', Blade says 'Run to safety!' – always – and they run off like headless chickens. They then disappear into walls or through those doors that Blade himself refuses to enter. 'Hmm, no reason for me to go in there,' he says. They'll also often just remain perfectly motionless in a room and not respond at all, their sole purpose seeming to be as static decoration or something to be shot.

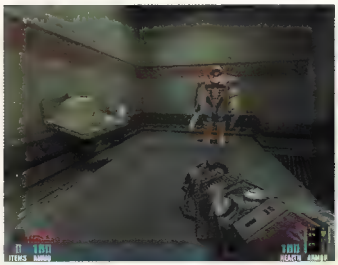
The next disappointment: 90 per cent of rooms in SiN have no interactivity beyond shooting up some of the objects. Even setting off large explosives leaves no visible marks after the debris has faded away. Weapons and their effects are reasonable – they're meatier than in Unreal – but their effects on the enemy contrive to make them feel puny. Having to unload a machine gun into grunts to kill them is just ridiculous. And while the idea of being able to deliver headshots must have seemed good on paper, it's taken way too far – you can plaster shots across an enemy but inflict little damage until a headshot is chanced upon.

Ritual Entertainment must be cursing under its breath. In any previous month SiN would have been a solid shooter. But that was before Half-Life. SiN contains all the elements you'd expect: strong story, good – occasionally excellent – level design, cinematic cut-scenes, loads of weapons and plenty of monsters to shoot. It also contains some unexpected twists – like its grossly gratuitous misogyny. Yet compared with Half-Life, none of it feels as real, scary, thrilling or even meaty enough to make an impact. That raw 'wow' factor remains noticeably absent.

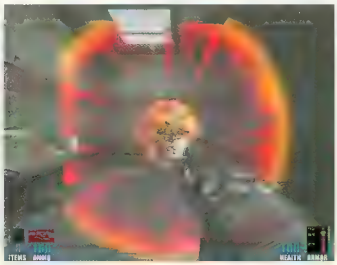
SiN's real crime is that it fails to advance the genre. It also suffers from serious issues such as crashing if the soundcard supports 3D sound, bad guys appearing through doors rather than taking the trouble to open them first, outrageously long loading times, and dozens upon dozens of the same brain-dead bad guys firing identical sounding machine guns. And it's never a terrific sign but already there are patches – a huge 19Mb patch is already available – ostensibly to fix stuff that one could argue should have been fixed before ship-out. Activision seems to be making a habit of this with its first-person shooters – but at least Quake II only needed a patch to fix multiplay when it first shipped.

If you can ignore the bugs and flaws and if you like your shooters simple, then SiN is a lengthy first-person shooter with all the bells and whistles. It also has capable multiplayer modes which at least make deathmatch a worthwhile romp, unlike Unreal. However, Half-Life remains in a different league.

Mat Bettinson



Get ready to die…



(Five minutes later)… Die dammit die! Die!

PROS: Competent first person shooter, lengthy single-player game

CONS: Buggy and bland, excessive loading times, annoying voices, brings very little that's fresh to the genre

RELEASE DATE: Out Now

★ ★ ★

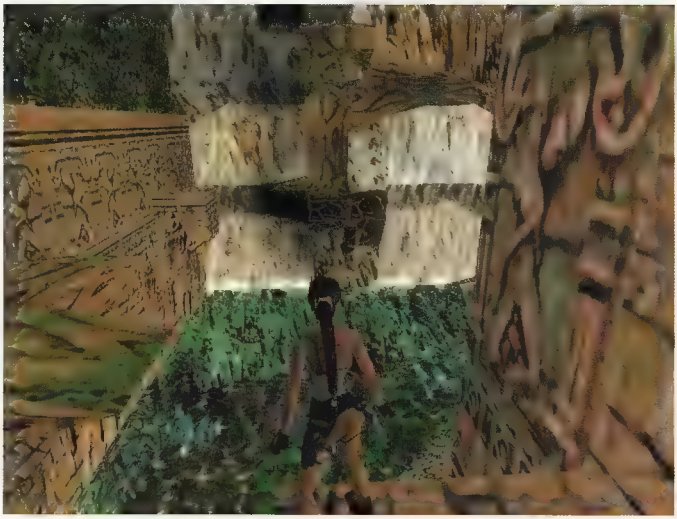
Tomb Raider III: Adventures of Lara Croft

A sequel too far?

LABEL: Eidos
TELEPHONE: 0181 780 2222
WEB: www.eidos.com
DEVELOPER: Core Design
PRICE: £29.99
NO. OF PLAYERS: 1
DIFFICULTY: Intermediate
AGE RATING: E, SPA 15+

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

Installation Win95/W n98 **Minimum PC** P166 **Minimum RAM** 16Mb **CD** Quad-speed **Graphics** DirectX 6.0-compatible graphics card **Sound** DirectX-compatible sound card **Control** Keyboard, joystick, joypad **Advanced Graphics Support** D3D



Ooh, pretty... Lara stops to admire the view

Just 10 months on from the first sequel, and the unstoppable Lara Croft is off on another death-defying adventure. This time she's after some artefacts carved from the remains of a comet found in the Antarctic – I won't spoil the story by telling you more.

Your travels will take you through regions as diverse as India, Nevada in the US, and London in search of the artefacts, and you'll need all the running, jumping, somersaulting skill you gained from the first two games to get you through.

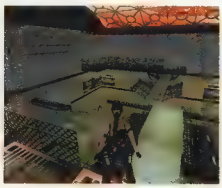
What's new since Tomb Raider II? Well, aside from some new outfits for our heroine – who can now monkey-swing from some ceilings and crawl through narrow gaps – not a lot has changed.

The programmers have spent a bit of time adding some bells and whistles to the graphics engine – the usual sort of tweaks that dedicated 3D hardware has to offer, such as dynamic coloured lighting and transparency effects. The game is now even able to render triangles as well as squares, which in theory allows for more flexibility when creating levels.

But it's no more than an incremental improvement on the original Tomb Raider engine, which after three years is beginning to show its age. For a start, nothing has been done to improve the terrible clipping problems that plagued both the earlier games – in some places it's even worse than before. The texturing is often embarrassingly poor – little effort has been put into making textures tile seamlessly, which just serves to highlight the blockiness of the level design.

The other major shortcoming of Lara's previous outings was the tedious combat, where Lara aimed for you and fights were just a case of firing until one or other of you died. This is still the form – although a couple of weapons now require you to aim

Some days, commuting can really get you down

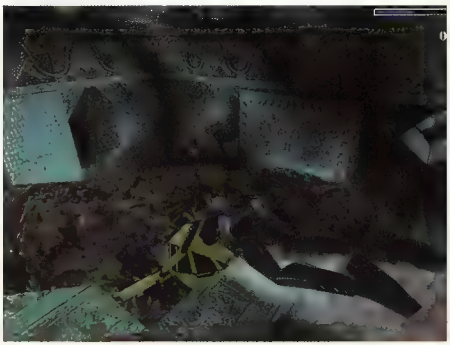


Lara perforates another evil minion. A woman's work is never done...

– and the supposedly 'improved' AI makes little, if any difference. Enemies don't attempt to dodge or hide, or use different attack strategies. It's still just stand, shoot, die or don't die.

What made up for these deficiencies in Tomb Raider II and turned it into a five-star game (see *PCGW February 1998*), was the scale, invention and ingenuity of the level design. Speedboating along Venetian canals, running round inside a ruined opera house, exploring a sunken cruise liner – the thrill of exploration made up for the lacklustre combat and iffy rendering.

The same, however, cannot be said of Tomb Raider III. It has its moments – the level based on a disused underground station is fun and the High Security Compound, which you must try to escape without the aid of your weapons, makes a change from the norm. But the majority of the levels are pedestrian at best, outright boring at worst.



Now *this* I like... the turbo-charged underwater zoomy thing

In the run-up to the game's release we were promised a move away from the key-collecting, switch-flipping days of yore, but there's precious little evidence of it here. Sometimes you can almost hear the designers saying, 'this level is too simple – I know, let's put in another room with a switch in it, that'll do'. When the creators make an effort to use the settings as inspiration for the challenges that confront you – having you collect a coin to buy a ticket to get through a gate in the Underground level, for example – it makes all the difference. But most of the time you're just toiling from room to room in search of the next key (or identity card, or dragon jewel, or whatever) to open the next door.

Some levels are just plain awful: the Caves of Kaliya, the last of the four uninspiring India levels that open the game, for example. A simple maze that can be completed in a couple of minutes, it features little more than a few snakes and the odd rolling boulder, then a showdown with the first of the big bosses. It's the sort of thing a kid would do as a first stab at level design – it should certainly never have made it into the final release.

London – the bizarre cubist nightmare version

One touch which might at least have made the game a bit more of a challenge – the inclusion of 'save crystals' which limit the number of times you can save the game – never made it into the PC version, despite being an option on the PlayStation. Instead the crystals give you a health boost, like the medipacks you find dotted about the place. So as with Tomb Raider II you can save as often as you like, which removes the sting of all but the hardest puzzles.

If you're new to Lara and her adventures then you should spend your money on a copy of Tomb Raider II, which is infinitely superior. But if you've already guided Ms Croft through her first two adventures and you're desperate for more, then this will just about fit the bill. However, if you can stand the wait you might just want to save your cash instead for Prince of Persia 3D, which is due March time, or thereabouts.

Pat Fox

PROS: Fun and challenging in places, plenty to keep you busy

CONS: Bland level design, same old clipping and combat problems

RELEASE DATE: Out Now

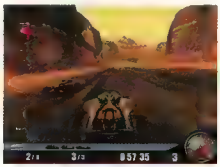
★ ★ ★

Powerslide

Getting a grip

Did you ever see the Mad Max films? Well GT Interactive is out to give you a chance for some similarly chaotic futuristic driving with Powerslide. The action here takes place in a whole variety of nicely dilapidated post-apocalyptic locations.

In single-player mode, you can race on a single track, or play in a progressive tournament through each course in turn, and there are different cars to choose from – each offering different handling characteristics with trade-offs between road-holding, acceleration and so on.



Give your opponents just deserts

The graphics engine is excellent, and makes good use of Voodoo 2 SLI mode to be fast and glitch-free up to a resolution of 1024x768. The high-res textures combine effective light sourcing with some of the prettiest cars of any game. From deserts to derelict cities, everything is beautifully drawn.

The driving is, unsurprisingly, mostly about powersliding, with every corner to be taken sideways. It's easy to get the hang of, and fine fun. But multiplayer is where it's at, and the single-player game is really just an audition for network play.

So this was New York...

When taken as a single-player game, there is rather too little variety in Powerslide to provide a sustained challenge. In particular, it's a real shame that the laps are so short. But if you like a bit of smash and crash on the network, Powerslide is well worth checking out.

Craig Paterson

ESSENTIALS:
GT Interactive, 0171 258 3791, £34.99, 1-8 players, Keyboard, steering wheel Age Rating: ELSPA All Ages

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
Installation: Win95/WinNT, Minimum PC: P166, 16Mb RAM, Quad-speed CD, SVGA, SoundBlaster and compatibles Advanced Graphics Support: D3D, 3Dfx, i740, 3DNow!

DIFFICULTY: Easy

RELEASE DATE: Out Now

★ ★ ★

ESPN Xgames Pro Boarder

Head for the slopes, dude

Snowboarding games used to be the preserve of the PlayStation or N64. Not any more – suddenly the PC is inundated with the things.

In this offering, you choose between one of eight actual pro riders taken from the sport's elite and away you go. Despite some flaws in the game engine, surfer animation is very fluid, the action is fast and furious, and gameplay conveys a convincing impression of speed. The only real problem is that the controls can be overly touchy, which sometimes makes lining up for a jump problematic.

And for my next trick...the goldfish

There are nine events to choose from, divided between straightforward races and big airs that are built solely for showing off combination manoeuvres. There are also two half-pipe events – the first is a slopestyle, filled with huge jumps and tons of things to bank and rail-slide on, while the second is a more traditional half-pipe allowing you to perform a handful of stunts in one swift run. As with the sport itself, the skill is in the special moves. There are apparently more than 2000 you can attempt, selected via key combinations. Each of the star pro-boarders has his own real-life trademark moves, some of which are mightily complicated and extremely hard to pull off. And, depending on the event, each stunt will need to be approached differently.

Above left: The graphics almost give a whiff of pine needles
Above right: Choose your alter-ego for their special skills

So it's all great on the slopes then? Well, mostly. Divebomb Indys and 1080s can only entertain for so long, but while they do, they do so very nicely. This is way better than last month's Snow Wave: Avalanche.

Gareth Gower

ESSENTIALS:
EA Sports, 01753 549442, £34.99, 1-8 players (2-8 via modem, serial link and LAN) Keyboard, joystick, gamepad, Age Rating: ELSPA All Ages

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
Installation: Win95/W.n98, Minimum PC: P166, 32Mb RAM, 8-speed CD, DirectX 6+ compatible graphics and sound cards, Advanced Graphics Support: D3D

DIFFICULTY: Intermediate

RELEASE DATE: Out Now

★ ★ ★

Dethkarz

Formula fear

Hurtling down a straight at 276kph – hope there's no speed cameras

Welcome to the future of motor racing, which in this case happens to be Dethkarz, Melbourne House's futuristic new racer. It plays like a cross between Formula One and Death Race 2000, and the action is set across four suitably gravity-defying futuristic tracks including the sprawling Metro City, the twisting Grand Keys and the sinister Red Planet. You can choose to race as one of four teams, and various classes of vehicle and competition types are available.

Graphically, Dethkarz is spectacular, and running at the top resolutions (1024x768) the tracks and cars are sumptuous, with sensational lighting and weapons effects enlivening each contest. But once your foot hits the accelerator you won't have time to notice, because the race rules are: there are no rules, and as well as being able to ram your opponents clean off the track, you can deploy several power-ups such as missiles and cluster mines to gain track position. Michael Schumacher would feel right at home, and the races are tremendous fun and lead to some really frenetic and downright dirty racing action.

The single-player game is diverting enough, but Dethkarz really shines in multiplay, and with several eager co-drivers and a gaggle of ForceFeedback wheels, it really is a tremendous giggle. Some extra tracks and cars would certainly have lent the proceedings more depth, but Dethkarz isn't really about that. Its metier is frenetic, essentially mindless, racing fun.

John Houlihan

ESSENTIALS:
Infogrames, 0161 827 8000, £34.99, No of players 1-9 (2-9 via modem, LAN, Internet), Keyboard, gamepad, wheel Age Rating: ELSPA All Ages

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
Installation: Win95/Win98
Minimum PC: P200 MMX, 16Mb RAM, Quad-speed CD, DirectX 6 and compatible graphics and sound Advanced Graphics Support: D3D, 3Dfx

DIFFICULTY: Intermediate
RELEASE DATE: Out Now

★ ★ ★

Small Soldiers Globotech Design Lab

Build a plastic hero and get his head kicked off

'Quasimodo's coming at me with a hammer!'

Globotech Design Lab puts you in charge of developing the next generation of Hasbro's toy Small Soldier action figures. You can elect to design either Gorgonites or Commandos, creating an army of five soldiers by selecting body parts, colouring them in and equipping them with memory and power chips.

Combat moves, from simple punches and kicks to devastating special moves, can be loaded into the soldier's memory chip (the more powerful the move, the more memory it uses and hence the fewer moves the soldier can perform). You then take the soldier into the combat zone (which is one of five rooms in a house) and attempt to beat the living daylights out of your plastic enemy.

As you get damaged, your body parts get weakened and then fall off, which is tough if your one powerful move uses the right arm you no longer have. When you win, more chips become available to you, and more powerful moves can be stored in the soldier.

It is an interesting twist to the beat 'em-up theme, but fails to score more highly because little effective use is made of the 3D accelerator card and it is too easy to win battles (you only have to charge an enemy and execute a lot of moves very quickly). That said, it's worth a look if you fancy a good scrap.

Mat Peck

ESSENTIALS:
Hasbro Interactive, 01429 855038, £29.99, 1-2 players (2 via same machine), Keyboard, gamepad Age Rating: ELSPA All Ages

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
Installation: Win95/Win98
Minimum PC: P100, 16Mb RAM, Quad-speed CD, DirectX compatible SVGA video, DirectX compatible sound card, Advanced Graphics Support: MMX, D3D, 3Dfx

DIFFICULTY: Easy
RELEASE DATE: Out Now

★ ★ ★

Heretic II

Doom with a view

LABEL: Activision
TELEPHONE: 01895 456 700
WEB: www.activision.com
DEVELOPER: Raven Software
PRICE: £39.99
NO. OF PLAYERS: 1-32 (2-32 via LAN or Internet)
DIFFICULTY: Intermediate
AGE RATING: E, SPA, 15+

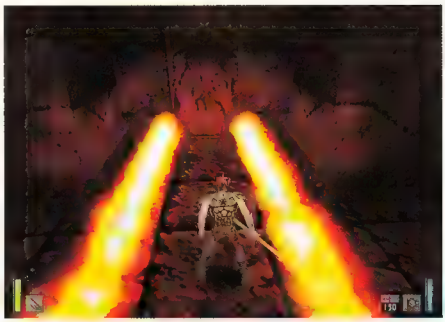
SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

Installation Win95/98/NT4 **Minimum PC** P166 **Minimum RAM** 32Mb **CD** Quad Speed **Graphics** SVGA **Sound** DirectX compatible **Control** Control Keyboard, Mouse **Advanced Graphics Support** Advanced Graphics Support OpenGL, 3Dfx, DirectX 6

Luxury home furnishings for the alien world that has everything

Using the Quake II engine, Raven has created a masterpiece as the fourth instalment in the Heretic/Hexen series. The most radical departure is the shift to a third-person perspective. Many purists will initially be shocked by this, or perhaps be put off the game altogether. If they are, then they'll be missing out on a game that in its depth and immersiveness is second only to Half-Life.

The use of the third-person point of view has allowed Raven to expand the range of movements that the player has access to, and it has created close to 1800 frames of animation for the main character alone. I was surprised when, while just standing around having a break, Corvus reached up and scratched the back of his neck.



Nice and warm just here

And the first time I entered a deathmatch arena, he turned around and beckoned me into the fray. With so many frames for both Corvus and each of the 22 monsters, the action is unusually fluid and naturalistic.

With the third-person perspective comes chase-camera problems, most commonly seen in the Tomb Raider series. This has been addressed by Raven, and the camera moves almost flawlessly behind Corvus. The only problems I encountered with the camera were caused by level design anomalies, rather than problems with the system. The control system in the game is derived from that in Quake II, so the camera view is entirely based on the movements of the mouse. You may think that this would be cumbersome, but Raven has tackled this with a flair that makes the control feel natural.

The new style brings a whole host of new moves that cannot be performed successfully in the first person, such as the pole vault. Corvus always has his Durhnwood staff, and vaults both to travel greater distances and to attack. Attacking moves vary depending on the type of weapon currently in use, so with the staff, moving forward and attacking will launch Corbus into a deadly scything spin and crouching will cause him to slash upwards into the victim's belly.

Another welcome addition is the ability to climb, and not just the standard jump onto a box. Moving close to a vertical surface and jumping will cause Corvus, if it is possible, to grab the ledge above his head and climb up. You can also use this talent when jumping large distances – Corvus will leap, and if it's just a little too far, will

Monsters can be disturbingly cunning strategists

grab the edge of a crevasse and dangle there for a moment before clambering up.

Raven has also spent a lot of time working on the monster AI. No longer do monsters just attack blindly. If you attack a single monster, there is a good possibility that if it becomes too injured, it will run away. In some cases, monsters will actively look for others to enlist in the attack, which can be quite disconcerting when you thought you were only facing a single opponent. The level of intelligence displayed also varies from species to species. Rats will generally attack in packs, and will chase you down. Harpies swoop down from above en masse, often from several quarters simultaneously.

Raven haven't skimped on eye candy or ear candy either, but they've done it with a designer's flair, blending the effects smoothly into the action so that the effects add to the experience rather than just look and sound good. Fires crackle in the background, water sloshes, harpies screech high above you. Infected Sidhe will yell: "There he is!" when they spot you, and Ssithra will hiss: "Kill him" as they attack. Corvus himself isn't entirely silent, piping up when a path is blocked, explaining what's happening.

Don't get me wrong. The game isn't just about slaughter and mayhem. Raven has worked hard to construct a strong, evolving story and the whole experience is made as immersing as possible. In-game scripted cutscenes, rendered using the game engine rather than pre-rendered, drive the story forward. Each conclusion of a mini quest has its own scripted scene, and sometimes performing an action or pressing a button will have an effect elsewhere in the map, so a short cutscene will show you what has happened.

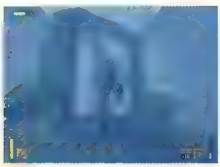
Each of the major characters has been given a suitable voice. The first encounter with the Andorian Healer left me speechless. Each stage along the path to the final showdown reveals a little more of the plot, and of the path Corvus must take. Plot continuity is maintained across each of the different levels, and often it is necessary to travel several maps away from your start point to finish a certain quest.

Raven has also expanded the game engine's capacity for usable artifacts. Many of the mini quests require the collection and use of a particular item, or in some cases more than one item. Once these items have been collected and returned to the correct place, a use prompt appears.

Each of the levels within the game has a consistent feel and the whole thing looks marvellous. The level designers have cleverly managed to develop changing environments throughout the game, from the crumbling slums of Andoria, with buildings listing and subsiding into the mire, to the eeriness of the Cloud Castle, the confusing interlinking tunnels of the T'Chekrik and the mines of the Ogles. Each area is quite distinct, yet each contains elements that tie it to the same world, providing an overall consistency and adding to the realism of the whole scenario.

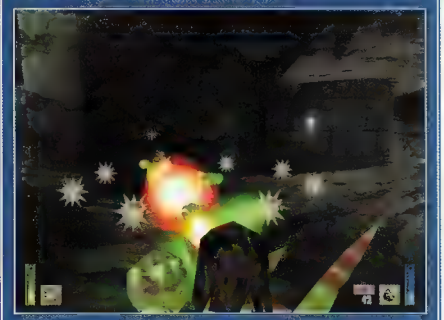
Tom Gordon

Who was your architect?



Why do I feel like Lara?

HERETIC II - MULTIPLAYER



When you consider a fast-paced deathmatch, third-person control is probably the last thing you would think of. Raven has managed, through careful use and good design, to create a third-person game where the deathmatch is as good as the single player game. The different point of view actually adds to the experience, allowing you to see people trying to sneak up from behind you. With the inclusion of the larger range of movements that can be accommodated in third-person view, deathmatch evolves from a simple run and shoot to a more strategic variant where defence plays as big a part as offensives. Unlike the previous incarnations, both defensive mana and offensive mana must be collected continuously rather than stored as in previous versions, so it becomes necessary at times to leave the fray to seek out more mana. With the inclusion of location-specific damage, deathmatch enters a new phase. It is now possible to attack another player and slice their arms off, or, after a particularly brutal attack, their head.

Heretic II is bundled with Gamespy Lite, so getting connected to an Internet game is extremely easy, as Gamespy Lite is preconfigured to contact the Heretic II master server and download the current list of Heretic II servers. Simply hit the refresh button, choose the game you want, and go.

PROS: Great-looking action sequel given a third-person dimension. You get glimpses of what Tomb Raider III could have been...

CONS: It's not quite Half-Life

RELEASE DATE: Out now

★★★★★

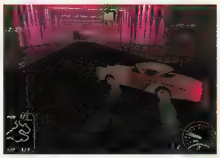
Speed Busters

Smokey gives you a grand for doing a ton...

LABEL: Ubi Soft
TELEPHONE: 0181 944 9000
WEB: www.ubisoft.com
DEVELOPER: Ubi Soft Montrea
PRICE: £29.99
NO. OF PLAYERS: 1-8 (2-8 via null, modem, modem or IPX LAN)
DIFFICULTY: ntermed ate
AGE RATING: ELSPA All Ages

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

Installation W n95/W n98 **Minimum PC** P166 **Minimum RAM** 16Mb **CD** Quad-speed **Graphics** SVGA **Sound** SoundBlaster compat.b e **Control** Keyboard, joyst ck, gamepad, steering whee (Force Feedback support) **Advanced Graphics Support** D3D, 3Dfx



Traffic police are not noted for their keen sense of right and wrong. I, for instance, have never gone over the speed limit in my life, but every time a traffic cop stops me they seem to think otherwise. 'I don't think I was over the speed limit officer', I say. 'Our radar says otherwise,' they reply. 'OK, you may have a point'. 'And you may have three points, sir'. Traffic police are also not noted for their sense of humour.

Ubi Soft's Montreal-based development wing has decided to do something for traffic cops' battered reputations by giving them a good guy role in Speed Busters. The official line is that a cop has won the lottery and decides to spend his cash by offering prizes to the fastest cars clocked by traffic radar in six locations around the United States. So rather than slowing down and taking it easy as the cops come into view you've got to hit the accelerator and rocket past them in the hopes of grabbing some cash. Don't try this on the way home, folks.

There are two types of race in the game – arcade and championship. Arcade is split into a stage-timed race on any of the available tracks, or a free-for-all-single car escapade that allows you to learn each track without the pressure of racing against other cars. A ghost mode can be switched on here to help you improve your times. But there is no substitute for racing against opponents – they like a bit of push and shove and your opposing computer AI drivers will take the fastest possible route to the cash, and if that's through you then so be it. By the same token you can, and should, mercilessly shunt them off the road too.

It's not the most stable car on the road, but the Bel Ray is easily the best looking – especially with optional rear wings...

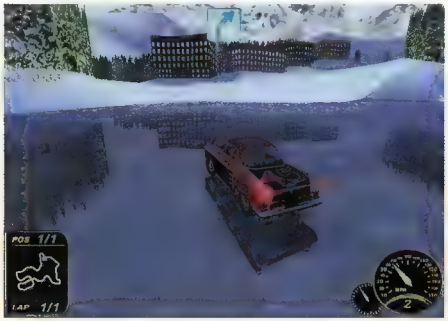
The second type of race in the game is Championship mode, where you compete against others for the maximum money. There are no difficulty level settings in Championship mode and it is hard to succeed to start with, so you really need to use Arcade mode to practise first.

Initially I found this a bit discouraging – maybe there should have been difficulty settings? With practice you do settle down though.

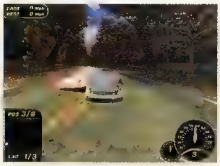
As you may have guessed already, Speed Busters is a pure arcade game and little pretence is made towards reality. Nevertheless the cars themselves manage to look just right while skidding and running through bends – the game engine borrows features from Ubi Soft's Monte Carlo Grand Prix Racing Simulation and the forthcoming POD 2, so the effect is convincing. Powersliding cars around corners is a hoot and judicious usage of a nitrous oxide booster is essential.

But the best features in the game, the ones that really make you feel as though you're a kid at an arcade machine again, are the imaginative shortcuts you can take – once you've figured them out – and the bizarre creatures and machines that block your way. Breaking through ice stalactites and road barriers reveal hidden parts of the circuit – some of which are narrow or difficult to negotiate, but all of which improve your times and profits. Meanwhile a large lobster, a shark, some aliens and various mechanical objects like cranes and snow-makers will attempt to knock you (and the opposition) off the road, given half a chance.

There are six cars and seven



Sliding over the ice while attempting to take a shortcut. *Nice...*



Watch the lean on that suspension!

tracks (six standard and a one hidden). The cars vary from 50s- and 60s-style vehicles with wallowy suspension and groovy bodylines to modern Lotus and Lamborghini lookalikes. Handling is distinctive in each type, and as you win money you can customise each car. Nothing is free in Speed Busters, so even if all you want is an arrow telling you the direction of the next turn, you have to buy it.

The tracks include city, swampland, snow and desert and there is considerable variety of surfaces on each individual track too. Weather effects are neat and also unpredictable. You'll play a track in the sun first time, then suddenly have to compete in the rain.

Speed Busters is easily one of the most arcade-convincing racing games on the PC at the moment. It is playable on keyboard or with a gamepad or joystick, but the best way is with a nicely weighted non-Force Feedback steering wheel and pedals. It does support Force Feedback, but I wasn't impressed with the responsiveness of the cars using it.

There are very few problems, however. I feel Speed Busters lacks truly compulsive addictiveness, and to improve this perhaps some recognisable AI driver personalities should have been included to give it a really competitive single-player feel. Also, six cars is a bit stingy – despite the fact that they are all upgradable and the paint scheme options are excellent (you can even import your own skins). Also Ubi Soft has seen fit to include a time-wasting reversing setup that makes it better to totally crash the car and have the computer automatically place you back on the track than to fumble around with keys, trying to get it into reverse and then back into forward gear again.

These are niggles. Speedbusters scores highly for inventiveness and sheer fun, and as a multiplayer game it's exceptional. It has a quirky brilliance that borders on madness – and if you fancy a fast, furious arcade racer where dinosaurs jump on your car and spaceships abduct it, then this is more than a little of what you want.

Alan Dykes

PROS: Bouncy old-style cars, mad-cap creatures and events, shortcuts, great multiplayer mode

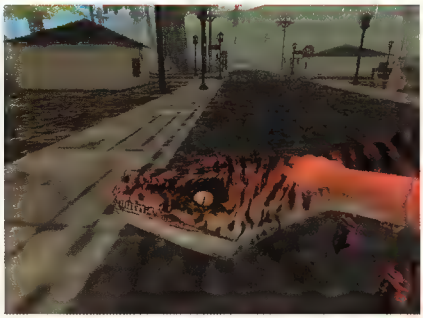
CONS: Championship difficulty level, silly, time-wasting reversing setup, minor graphical glitches

RELEASE DATE: Out Now

★★★★

Trespasser: Lost World

Warning – it's not what you expect



Surprising only to herself, Anne never saw her right arm again

This game has sparked considerable controversy. Those expecting another Unreal have found Trespasser incredibly tedious (our US sister magazine, *Computer Gaming World*, gave it its poorest rating). Yet others (the game has been on release stateside for a while now) have praised its strong sense of atmosphere.

Trespasser – loosely based on Speilberg's *Lost World* movie – is set on the island Site B, where your character, Anne, has crash-landed. The levels – huge, jungle-based sections of the island – must be explored to find the means of escape. Unsurprisingly, dinosaurs populate this island and, while some are harmless, others, including velociraptor, are predatory. You use Anne's right arm to interact with an environment built on a novel, physics-based engine, where water ripples realistically and things fall over when you push them. Trespasser aims, therefore, to be much more life-like than other 3D games.

The results are hard to master: by turns challenging and annoying. A byproduct of this drive for accuracy is also an infrequency of dinosaur encounters that lends the whole affair an empty-hearted air. Developer DreamWorks clearly overreached itself somewhere in the development cycle. Here there may once have been the makings of a leading-edge first-person shooter but little of that survives in the finished article.

Mat Peck

ESSENTIALS:
DreamWorks, 01753 549442, £34.99, 1 player, Mouse, keyboard, gamepad Age Rating: ELSPA All Ages

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
Installation: Win95/Win98 Minimum PC: P166, 32Mb RAM, Quad-speed CD, 1Mb Windows-compatible video, Windows-compatible sound Advanced Graphics Support: MMX, D3D, 3Dfx, PowerVR, Intel i740, Matrox Gx00

DIFFICULTY: Intermediate

RELEASE DATE: Out Now

★★

Newman-Haas Racing

Fast but loose

Indy CART race simulators are gaining support as an alternative to the the well-trodden path of Formula 1. Newman-Haas Racing offers the whole thing from an arcade perspective.

You control one of 16 drivers, racing on 15 tracks, and there are some basic car setup options, involving steering and braking.

Play options range from a quick-race mode that dumps you straight into the action, through a single-race game right up to an entire championship. Network play allows up to eight players to go head-to-head.

In play, Newman-Haas is something of a mixed bag. The scenery is detailed, but there are clipping problems, and the cars look distinctly cardboard-cutout from some angles. Once the game is under way, though, there is a good sense of speed. There are plenty of camera angles, but there is an annoying feature on external views that pulls the camera out to a wide angle when you crash. It's distracting, and the last thing you need just as your car is sent spinning. An over-busy horizon also makes it difficult to see bends as you approach them.

An overlaid map shows you where you are on the track

Play is ultimately uninspiring. There are no major control complaints, but your car is just never quite fun enough to drive. And for an arcade-style game, the car dynamics try to be too faithful.

Newman-Haas is a competent addition, but it sits uncomfortably between arcade racer and true simulation.

Craig Paterson

ESSENTIALS:
Psygnosis, 01244 659286, £39.99, 1-8 players (2 via split-screen, 2-8 via IPX LAN), keyboard, steering wheel, Age Rating: ELSPA All Ages

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
Installation: Win95/Win98 Minimum PC: P133, 16Mb RAM, Quad-speed CD, SVGA, SoundBlaster and compatibles, Advanced Graphics Support: D3D, 3Dfx

DIFFICULTY: Intermediate

RELEASE DATE: Out Now

★ ★

Test Drive 5

Huge improvement

Only a few months after Test Drive 4, Accolade has already produced a sequel. The promise is of vastly improved graphics to make the most of second-generation 3D hardware, with a wide range of new cars and new tracks. The theme is faithful to the earlier games – road-racing on circuits around the world, with other traffic on the road and police on patrol.

There is plenty of variety, with 28 cars and 18 tracks, but unfortunately the menu structure is poorly designed, and there's too much clicking through options to get the setup and race that you want.

Graphically, the 3D support delivers – and the game looks great. Test Drive 4 looked distinctly dated against its contemporaries, but this is more like it. The scenery detailing, in particular, is excellent, especially in high-res mode, and movement is smooth and glitch-free. The only complaint is that authenticity leads to a slightly bland set of colours.

Urban fun without the need for a trolley jack and Haynes manual

Where Test Drive games have suffered in the past is in gameplay. Test Drive 5 has made great strides, and the cars are more fun to drive. However, the competition hasn't stood still either, and for playability this comes a definite second to its closest competitor – Need For Speed III. Winning is about largely conservative driving, notwithstanding the occasional handbrake turn.

Test Drive5 is a big step up for this long-running series, now closing on the race leader. There's enough promise here to suggest Test Drive 6 could be the one to overtake Need For Speed.

Craig Paterson

ESSENTIALS:
Electronic Arts, 01753 546465, £34.99, 1-6 players (2-6 via LAN), keyboard, joystick, steering wheel, Age Rating: ELSPA All Ages

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
Installation: Win95/Win98 Minimum PC: P133 (with 3D accelerator) P200 (no 3D card), 32Mb RAM, Twin-speed CD, SVGA, SoundBlaster and compatibles, Advanced Graphics Support: D3D, Riva TNT

DIFFICULTY: Intermediate

RELEASE DATE: Out Now

★ ★ ★

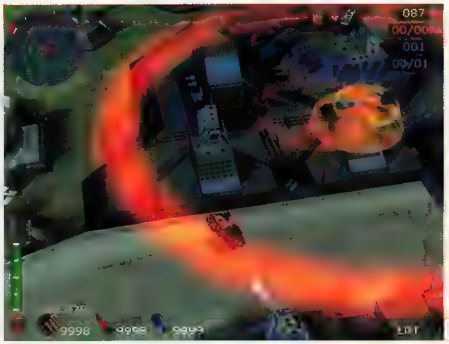
Future Cop: LAPD

Strange how the City of Angels' future is always apocalyptic...

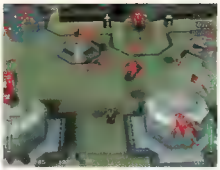
LABEL: Electronic Arts
TELEPHONE: 01753 549442
WEB: www.futurecop.com
DEVELOPER: In-house
PRICE: £34.99
NO. OF PLAYERS: 1-2 (2 via modem or LAN)
DIFFICULTY: Easy
RATING: ELSPA 11+

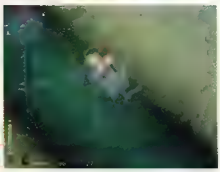
SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

Installation Win95/Win98 **Minimum PC** P166 **Minimum RAM** 32Mb **CD** Quad-speed **Graphics** SVGA **Sound** SoundBlaster and compatibles **Control** Keyboard, joystick, gamepad **Advanced Graphics Support** D3D, 3Dfx



Even a big explosion doesn't shift any masonry





Top: If it's cop shows you want, this one should be called Cannon... Below: Transformers in disguise – or not, really

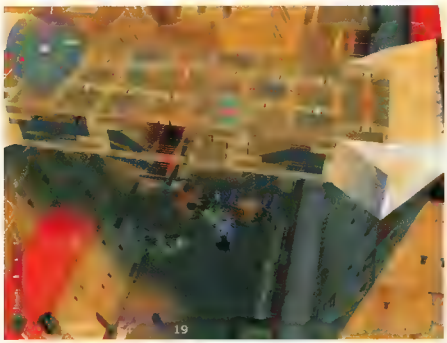
It's dystopic future time again folks. Los Angeles, City of Angels, has become an even worse pit of horrors by the year 2098. The police, unable to cope, have turned to technology and unlimited firepower. Obviously all those Neighbourhood Watch meetings didn't do the trick. It's up to you to blaze a trail of glory in a souped-up Transformer that looks suspiciously like a machine from *Robocop*.

The playing style is reminiscent of Desert Strike and its sequels: above and behind perspective, mission-based, totally arcade, with a good variety of heavy duty ordnance to separate the bad guys from their small intestines. You plough into the enemy territory, blasting furiously at machine guns, automated missile launchers and soft, pliant flesh with equal aplomb.

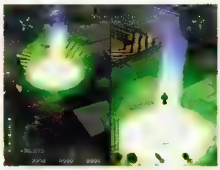
The control method favours the gamepad, but the keyboard works equally well.

The early missions are easy and allow you to get a feel for the game before you turn up the heat. Your vehicle, the TAC X-1 Alpha, has two modes – the hover car for when you have to get there quickly or, if manoeuvrability is your priority, there's the ED-209 mode.

The levels are mostly well designed and have that future-punk functionality of Syndicate Wars. Unlike that title though, you can't blow anything up except the bad guys. It's a pity because some of the levels could do with a bit of wanton destruction. The views can be a little limiting at times, also, and it can be irritating to know that enemy troops – aching to have their heads blown off – just can't be seen. To be fair, though, the aiming system compensates, automatically locking on to any target within 60 degree arcs in front or above.



Some of the views turn up some impressive architecture



Multiplay, the split-screen way

There is also another mode of play called Precinct Assault. Nothing to do with the mission-based game it's basically a set of arenas with two bases and you in the TAC X-1. The idea is to score points by taking out the enemy emplacements and forces. Use the points to build your planes and tanks and take the enemy base. You can play against the AI or you can take on your mate in split-screen, modem connection or LAN. I say 'mate' because you are limited to two players. This applies to the mission-based game as well, which isn't so bad, but Precinct Assault should have supported more players.

Future Cop is quick, fun and well designed enough that you don't mind the occasional fault.

Paul Ditta

PROS: Easy to pick up. Fun to play. Good difficulty curve. Looks the business

CONS: Head-to-head only in multiplayer. Controllable views would be nice. As would reactive scenery

RELEASE DATE: Out Now

★★★★

Thief: The Dark Project

Eidos lets loose its artful dodger

LABEL: Eidos
TELEPHONE: 0181 636 3000
WEB: eidosinteractive.co.uk
DEVELOPER: Looking Glass Studios
PRICE: £44.99
NO. OF PLAYERS: 1
DIFFICULTY: Intermediate
AGE RATING: ELSPA 15+

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

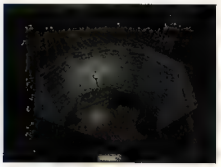
Installation Win95/Win98 **Minimum PC** P166 **Minimum RAM** 32Mb **CD** Quad-speed **Graphics** DirectX6 only **Sound** DirectX6 only **Control** Keyboard, mouse **Advanced Graphics Support** 3Dfx

Once spotted, guards will rush to attack you. Time to try the 'Ooh! Look over there!' ploy

If the thought of an old-fashioned world of crime brings to mind a street urchin stealing handkerchiefs while his friends hitch their thumbs into their armpits and sing 'Consider yourself', then Thief: The Dark Project will come as something as a shock to the system. In the world of Thief – a gothic/Dickensian nightmare of winding streets and nefarious opportunities – singing would only make you a target and your best friends are a blackjack and a well-strung bow. Meet Garrett: master thief. As tough as Bill Sykes and more cunning than a dozen Fagins.

Ironically, Thief: The Dark Project echoes the life of Oliver Twist when your character, as a boy, is caught pick-pocketing by a member of The Keepers: a cowled brotherhood whose activities are veiled in secrecy. Impressed with your abilities (that you even saw him, rather than your robbery skills) you are taken under his wing and coached in the arts of a professional thief. This section of the game acts as a training session for you the game player, as your guide takes you through the various skills necessary to survive the murky world outside. Once swordplay, bowmanship and stealth have been mastered, you are then on your own and free to pursue a profitable life of crime.

The world of Thief is viewed through Garrett's eyes in a familiar first-person perspective and offers you an almost completely uncluttered view of your surroundings. Your health is indicated by a row of tiny shields, your inventory (containing compass, health potions and whatever else you may have picked up or stolen) can be accessed at the touch of a button and any weapon that you are holding will be shown in your hand. The only other thing on permanent display is the Visibility Gem, an invaluable



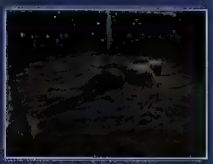
Grave rob for fun and profit

WHEEEEEEEEEERE IS LOVE?

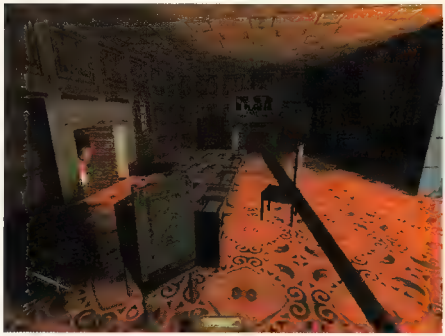
Nobody likes a sneak. Unfortunately, as Garrett, you're the greatest sneak around and so shouldn't expect much sympathy from the people you meet. Here is a selection of the happy folk who will undoubtedly attempt to kill you on sight

Guard: Sword-wielding soldiers are found almost everywhere

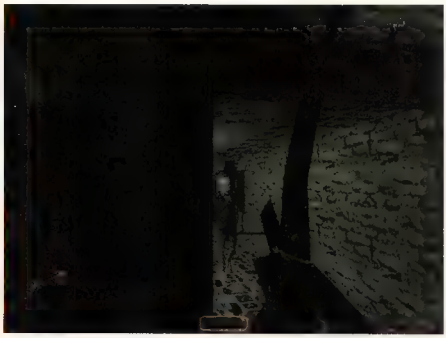
Hammerites: Take great delight in clubbing you senseless



Zombie: How do you kill something that is already dead?



Nice carpet, but where's the safe?



Firing arrows from the shadows is the best way to surprise your enemies

little device that glows or dims to black depending on the brightness of your surroundings and lets you know whether you can be seen or not.

The storyline unfolds and evolves with every mission and each is preceded by an introduction narrated by Garrett. His first 'job' is to break into the house of a wealthy merchant and steal a valuable sceptre for his fence, Cutty. Having slinked your way through the sewers and into the mansion, eliminated the guards and located the piece, you return to find that Cutty has been arrested and thrown into the prison of the merciless Hammers. A ruthless band run by the sinister Harry Redknapp. (OK, so that last bit wasn't true). Finding Cutty gone, you resolve to break into the prison and release him, and so the plot begins to thicken. Through crypts and cathedrals, mansions and castles, your adventures will lead Garrett into the dark underside of an already murky world.

Sound plays a crucially important role in Thief, generating a continual air of both realism and tension. Your enemies don't just mutely march around, they whistle, they mutter, they talk to one another and, more often than not, you will hear them long before you see them. Standing nervously in the shadows while an unseen guard's footsteps get louder is a common occurrence in Thief and, if the pressure becomes so great that you bolt to safety, your own footsteps might just give you away. Every surface you walk upon has its own distinct sound, making it very easy for both you and (unfortunately) the enemy to tell exactly what type of ground you are walking on. Carpet and grass make hardly any sound at all while floor tiles and metal grilles are best avoided unless you can cover them with a muffling moss arrow. The safest way to complete any mission is to leave your enemies unaware that you were ever there.

When it comes to combat, again, stealth is your primary weapon. Armour, though offering much better protection, is a little clanky and impractical for the average thief so Garrett never uses it. This makes taking on every guard that you encounter with your sword the suicidal, last-resort solution. Far better to pick them off with a well-placed arrow when their back is turned before hiding the body than risk injury to yourself at the sharp end of a blade. Especially since, as the game progresses, many new types of arrows, mines and bombs become available to aid your endeavours.

Thief: The Dark Project is about as far removed from the typical first-person blast 'em-up as a 60s musical is from real life. You have to play smart, not hard and use stealth instead of strength. That said, violence is often unavoidable in order to achieve your goals, and there is immense satisfaction to be had in a successful kill that does not alert your enemies. The locations are drenched in atmosphere: both visually and audibly and the tension can be tangible as you creep your way through catacombs and corridors in search of loot.

From the shadows of a cluttered genre, a genuinely original and thoroughly enjoyable title has crept into the light.

Gordon Barrick

No, that's just a little too close, thank you. Zombies find you irresistible

The training session allows you to get to grips with the various eccentricities of the bow

PROS: Very original and engrossing spin on the first-person shooter

CONS: Make sure you've got DirectX6 compatible everything

RELEASE DATE: Out Now

★★★★★

O.D.T.

Tomb Raider Lite...

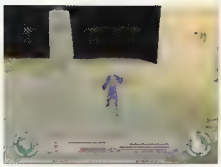
LABEL: Psygnosis
TELEPHONE: 0151 282 3333
WEB: www.psygnosis.com
DEVELOPER: Psygnosis
PRICE: £39.99
NO. OF PLAYERS: 1
DIFFICULTY: Intermediate
AGE RATING: ELSPA 15+

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
Installation Win95/Win98 **Minimum PC** P120 **Minimum RAM** 16Mb **CD** Quad-speed **Graphics** SVGA **Sound** SoundBlaster or compatibles **Control** Keyboard, digital joystick, digital gamepad **Advanced Graphics Support** D3D

The title, in case you were wondering, stands for Or Die Trying. You play one member of a five-strong team that has crash-landed in the Forbidden Zone of your planet while on your way home to deliver a magical crystal that will save your people. Your mission is to escape the Forbidden Zone. Cue much key finding, lever pulling and ledge climbing à la Lara Croft.

O.D.T. has added a little role-playing into the mix: you choose from four characters, one of whom is strong, one is good with magic and so on. There are spells to learn and improve and a basic skill and attribute set that can be improved using experience gained by killing creatures.

The levels are all cross-connected and you can move between them in any order. This is quite refreshing after the relative linearity of Tomb Raider.



Did we mention the short-range view?

The levels themselves, however, are rather drab. The Forbidden Zone is apparently high in the sky and for the most part you have to negotiate ledges and narrow bridges. There is very little variation in the architecture and everything has a square or rectangular look to it. The levels are connected by ladders – climb down and the next level loads. Fall off the ladder before that, though and you fall to your death because the game isn't yet aware that there is supposed to be ground beneath you.

The graphics are on the right side of functional... just. The characters are underdeveloped, not even having facial features. The monsters are lacking in detail and have quite a twitchy AI. Sometimes they duck, run away from grenades and take cover, at others they stand around and let you blow them out of their polygonal socks without budging an inch. Just as well, considering that aiming is a real chore. No auto-aiming here, not even assisted aiming and, considering your ammunition is scarce, this makes for frustrating play.

Or the uninteresting architecture?

Nice water effects, though

The control options are the same as in Tomb Raider, but with one annoying omission. Considering the fact that the levels are all ledges above mile high drops you would think that there would be a walk function that would stop you running off the edges and into space. Well there is, but it only works when you're going forward and will let you quite happily sail off into the great beyond walking sideways or backwards.

O.D.T. feels like a game intended for play on a console. It even has save game points and lives. The story never involves you and the action is rather repetitive. This might do well on PlayStation, but the lack of depth and sub-standard graphics make it an also-ran on the PC.

Paul Ditta

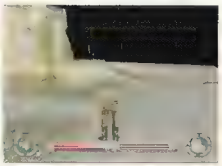
PROS: Non-linear progression, roleplaying elements

CONS: Substandard graphics, unimaginative level design, little involvement, save points, derivative

RELEASE DATE: Out Now

★ ★

The man without a face



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PC - CD ROM

The thing about classics and puzzle games is everybody plays them

Classics & Puzzles is easily the smallest discrete genre that we cover in the magazine. And its titles will probably never convey the buzz or sheer visceral impact of something like Half-Life or Total Annihilation. Sometimes there are so few releases in it that I even get to thinking whether it's worth having a separate C&P section that month.

But then some new reader research or conversations with gamers will remind me why it's the pivotal genre. It's where it all started. Everybody plays classic and puzzle games. Everybody.

The difference is just they don't play them in the same way other types of games are played. If it's a classic game it'll either be a conversion of a coin-op classic – in which case it will be played with perhaps wistful nostalgia. Or it's a conversion of some family boardgame, such as Cluedo or Scrabble, making it – quite unlike all the other genres – a family-oriented gaming experience. It's the one sub-genre that brings the whole family involved with PC gaming.

And if it's a puzzle game then it's something to dip into and dip out of – a chocolate bar, rather than a four-course blow-out! And the best of this type withstand the test of time and continue to be played long after it is usual for a game to be. Tetris is the classic example. Easy to pick up, impossible to put down. So simple. I know what you're thinking: 'Yeah, Tetris and what else?' Well, they do happen along. A great little game called Swing from German developer Software 2000 will soon be released in the UK. Cal has been hooked on this for months now – and when I say hooked I mean really hooked! We had a string of letters from readers after we published the demo on our CD saying how great it is. So it is true. There is great puzzle gaming life after Tetris!

David Kelly

Comments or questions on classics and puzzles? Write to David Kelly or email him on david_kelly@zd.com

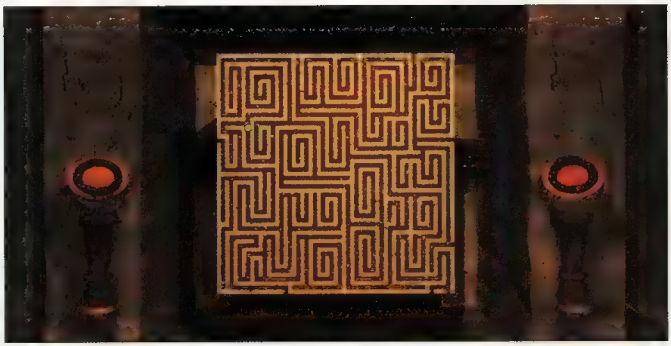
Jewels Of The Oracle

Treasure tests

'Discover your own true nature,' it says in the accompanying booklet to this puzzle-fest. Thanks, but no thanks – I now know that my true nature is to shout, scream and generally throw a paddy when I can't get my head around a particularly challenging puzzle.

The brain-teasers are part of a quest in which the player searches for the intriguing world of Nisus – a society of flawless symmetry, governed by the principles of peace, harmony and perfect understanding. Wow, that's really beautiful man. Being such a beautiful place, it's pretty hard to get into. But if you can solve the puzzles and collect the jewels with which you are rewarded, you can enter its hallowed portals.

So what will they tax your brain with on this quest? First you have to go to the well room, where you will be able to choose your puzzles. There are six houses, each with a separate theme and four puzzles of its own. Communications and recording, logic, science and understanding and planning construction and maintenance are among the themes. It's like playing on the set of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, with hieroglyphics on stone walls, rush lighting and huge stone doors that rumble open to reveal chambers where puzzles and conundrums await you.



Totally amaze-ing. Get the ball to the right spot on this 3D bagatelle

The puzzles themselves are varied and taxing – some deceive the player by their simplicity. 'This is going to be a sinch,' is a bad attitude to have – as I found to my cost. A 3D bagatelle maze ties your mind into so many knots, while a variation on those little plastic tile puzzles that I used to love as a kid had me running round in cyber circles. The oracle sits at the top of the screen and will pass on words of wisdom when asked – but be warned, some clues are more obvious than others.

Computer games are often criticised for being mindless and lacking intellectual challenge. Here's a game that dispels that myth. Does for your mind what Jane Fonda did for your body. Feel the burn, baby.

Naomi MacKay

ESSENTIALS:
Iona, 0181 296 9454, £29.95, 1 player, Keyboard, mouse Age Rating: ELSPA All Ages

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
Installation: Win95/Win98 Minimum PC: 486, 8Mb RAM, Dual speed CD, SVGA, SoundBlaster compatibles Advanced Graphics Support: None

DIFFICULTY: Advanced

RELEASE DATE: Out Now

★ ★ ★ ★

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It's a rare game that's first among sequels

Funny how you can wait ages for a good game, then half a dozen all come along at once. Right at the moment, us strategy gamers are spoilt for choice, what with Caesar III and Railroad Tycoon II last month. Now we have Settlers III, a worthy sequel to two very popular titles. And Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri is still out there, somewhere: while for those who prefer their challenges to be more of a historical nature, Talonsoft's West Front and Microsoft's Close Combat III are both imminent.

We've had a beta of Close Combat III knocking around the office for a while. It looks excellent (so long as Microsoft finishes off the campaigns properly). Our production editor, Ian (an unreconstructed wargamer if ever there was one) has been having great fun hunting German tanks with Molotov cocktails. It's extremely accurate – which means early war Russian infantry has to take on the might of the Panzers with ludicrously inadequate anti-tank weapons, with the tables being turned pretty effectively on those rare occasions when a Russian heavy KV1 tank lumbers onto the battlefield.

I remember being a bit sniffy about Close Combat II at first – until I found out how to actually play it, and got hooked. Sounds like CCIII will hook me just as much. I'm not too sure about West Front, though. We haven't seen any early code yet, and I was disappointed with East Front, which was just too slow. A pity – I loved Talonsoft's earlier Battleground series.

It's totally unfair on games companies, of course: if they produce something brilliant, we expect them to be able to do it again, time after time. If they don't, if they just manage to put out something that's average, or even good, we moan that it's not up to standard. And if they do manage to pull off a double, and produce another brilliant title, well, the pressure on them to perform just gets even tougher.

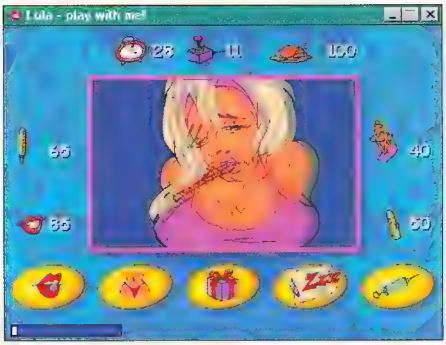
No surprise, then, that companies which produce something that works well tend to use that title as the basis for their next game. In some ways, that's fine – if the game engine works, then they should exploit it to the maximum. But sequels all too often lack something of the magic of the first in the series. It happens with films, as well: *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* just wasn't a patch on the original *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, while *The Empire Strikes Back* wasn't half as good as *Star Wars*. It's usually because the follow-up all too often seems to have been put together to the identical formula as the first one, yet somehow leaving out everything that was exciting.

Sometimes, though, companies get sequels right: and the follow-ups contain everything that was good about the original, while correcting glitches and building on ideas. Often, though, it's not until the third in the series that anything like the magic of the first title is recaptured…

Martin Croft
Comments or questions on strategy and wargaming? Write to Martin or email him on pcgw_mail@zd.com

Lula Virtual Babe

Love her or leave her



Whaddayya mean you've got a headache?!

First time round she was a successful soft-porn heroine in a 'business' management game. Now she's a virtual pet who you feed, massage and – there's no getting round the fact – shag. Tamagotchi with tits, if you will.

Keep Lula well oiled in every sense and she'll be up for fun. Get her too drunk or tired and there's no Mr Wobbly plays hide the sausage for you. That's the gameplay, such as it is. Lula pouts, sulks, groans and bounces around your desktop in a sweaty, animated fashion for the 28 days that you have to make her happy. I can't tell you what happens after that because I'd long since rolled over and gone to sleep.

There was a very similar piece of Mac software about 10 years ago which featured a greyscale naked babe, a bloke with an eight-ball for a head, and a toolbox of toys. As you can see, progress is a marvellous thing.

Teach Lula how to shop for clothes that fit her!

Like its more explicit predecessor, Lula VB will probably sell by the shovel-load. And, of its type, it's actually not that bad when you consider the alternatives (Jo Guest's Love Bites still ranks as *the* worst software we've ever seen). It's a simplistic and repetitive one-gag wonder, but if that's good enough for Lara it's good enough for Lula, too. It's decently produced, the sound effects are guaranteed to offend in any office, and – at £12 – she's a cheap date.

All right, it is pretty lame really, and the thought of actually paying for a copy is quite scary. But someone, somewhere will see Lula VB as the ideal Christmas gift.

Elvis Sausage

ESSENTIALS:
Take 2, 01753 854444, £12.99, 1 player, Mouse, Age Rating: BBFC 18

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
Installation: Win95/Win98 Minimum PC: 486/100, 8Mb RAM, Dual-speed CD, SVGA Hi-colour, DirectX-compatible sound, Advanced Graphics Support: None

DIFFICULTY: Easy

RELEASE DATE: Out Now

★ ★

Rival Realms

You'll live to fight another day...

LABEL: Digital Integration
TELEPHONE: 01276 678806
WEB: www.digint.co.uk
DEVELOPER: Activ Pub
PRICE: £26.99
NO. OF PLAYERS: 1-6 (2-6 via nul. modem, modem or IPX LAN)
DIFFICULTY: Intermediate
AGE RATING: ELSPA All Ages

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

Installation Win95/Win98 **Minimum PC** P90 **Minimum RAM** 16Mb **CD** Dual-speed **Graphics** SVGA **Sound** SoundBlaster and compatibles **Control** Keyboard, mouse **Advanced Graphics Support:** None

If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery then Rival Realms' developer, the Romanian Activ Pub, has done the equivalent of giving Warcraft a big bunch of flowers and calling it the most beautiful girl in the world. There may be three races in the game – humans, greenskins (orcs in effect) and elves – but as far as the plot and execution is concerned this might as well be Warcraft II point V. But delve deeper and you'll find innovations that raise Rival Realms onto a platform all of its own.

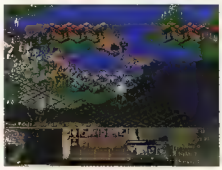
Activ Pub must be a big fan of Blizzard because the stamp of Diablo is also indelibly marked on the game. Rival Realms is the first large-scale real-time strategy game that features roleplaying elements for *all* its living characters. Units from human bowmen and greenskin stone throwers to knights and warlords can collect experience points and up to four inventory items each. Each unit can be enhanced in many ways and although it can get quite complicated trying to chop and change collected items throughout an entire army, it's still a hell of an innovation. Even better, you can save surviving units with high stats at the end of a scenario and buy them back with your spare gold at the beginning of the next. Living units can also be rested and they will recover health by themselves after a battle.

After all this excitement the non-living units are a bit of a disappointment. Human ballistas and greenskin catapults are little different from their Warcraft counterparts, although the Elven cannon add lethal spice to the game. Each race has two sea units – battleships and transports and there are no upgrades.

Control in general is excellent, with plenty of keyboard shortcuts and a clear, useful panel with more options than a Rolls-Royce catalogue. Another innovation is that you're able to organise troops into proper formations using keys F5-F8. Building and harvesting resources is simple and all you have to do is keep an eye on food, gold and wood levels.

Human towns are not very exciting, but those inventory slots are!

Gold lies around for the taking but you've got to fight for it



Orcish settlements look better

Unfortunately, graphically Rival Realms looks extremely dated. Resource-gathering peasants have the same animation whether they're harvesting food, chopping trees or digging gold, and the idea itself of gold littered all over the land to be harvested like potatoes is not one which inspires the imagination. Buildings are plain in the human realm and while they are a bit more imaginatively designed for elves and greenskins there's nothing new here. And no matter what sort of terrain you're on everything seems a bit dull – functional, yes, but dull. There's plenty of audio too, and it's mostly obtrusive. Some of the voices are actually quite funny – once or twice. Click on your cavalry and they'll reply 'my sword is sharp' in a camp American Civil War Confederate accent. Which is all very well, but once you engage in battle, a nerve-grinding cacophony of repeated phrases will soon have you switching off the sound effects.

If Rival Realms was simply a Warcraft clone it would be an exceedingly average game, but the addition of easily renewable health, inventory slots for units, experience points, saved units and nifty magic powers for priests and wizards raises the stakes considerably. With these features Rival Realms is transformed into a hybrid game that has lastability and addictiveness well beyond the initial impression it gives. For a first-time product from an unknown eastern European developer it shows considerable promise for the future.

Mike Allen

PROS: Great roleplaying elements, renewable health, flexible shortcuts and unit selections

CONS: Looks a bit dated, repetitive audio does grate

RELEASE DATE: Out Now

★★★★

The Settlers III

Wok like an Egyptian?

LABEL: BluеByte
TELEPHONE: 01604 232200
WEB: www.settlers3.com
DEVELOPER: In-house
PRICE: £34.99
NO. OF PLAYERS: 1-8 (2-8 via IPX, LAN or Internet)
DIFFICULTY: Intermediate
AGE RATING: ELSPA All Ages

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

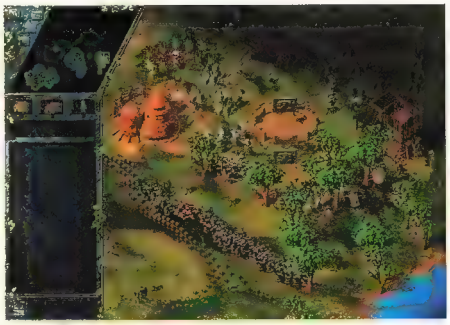
Installation Win95/Win98 **Minimum PC** P120 **Minimum RAM** 16Mb **CD** Quad-speed **Graphics** SVGA **Sound** SoundBlaster and compatibles **Control** Keyboard, mouse **Advanced Graphics Support** D3D

The highlighted unit is an Egyptian priest. He recieves his mana from the idol beside him. The building with the silver still to the right hand side is a brewery. Egyptian Gods like the odd pint of lager, apparently

What did the ancient Romans, Egyptians and Chinese all have in common? A fondness for drink. And if the storyline for The Settlers III is to be believed their popular deities were serious bingers too.

According to the script, Rome's Jupiter, Egypt's Horus (the bird-faced thing) and China's Ch'ih-yu dragon deity have all been suitably admonished by The Supreme Being for being lazy drunkards (sort of like mythical Gazzas) and letting their earthly realms go to pot. They in turn task you with winning back their lands and righting wrongs. The result is a campaign-based, real-time strategy game.

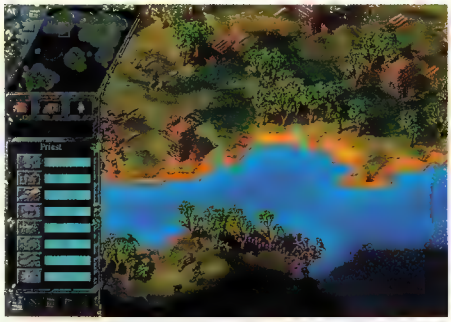
As well as conquest, The Settlers III involves resource micro-managing on a grand scale. A settlement needs woodcutters, a sawmill, a stonemason and a tree planter – and that's just the beginning. Heavy industry needs to be set up so that armies can be built, so you need to find coal, iron-ore and gold, then build mines to mine them. But miners get hungry so you need to supply them with food. For a start this involves building a grain farm, a mill, a well and a bakery to supply bread, coal miners' favourite food. But iron miners prefer bacon, so you've got to build a pig farm and a slaughterhouse to supply them. And, just to be difficult, gold miners prefer fish. Each building has to be patiently constructed to progress in the game – miss something and your plans will be scuppered. Luckily, on later levels, some of the more basic bits and pieces are already in place when you start.



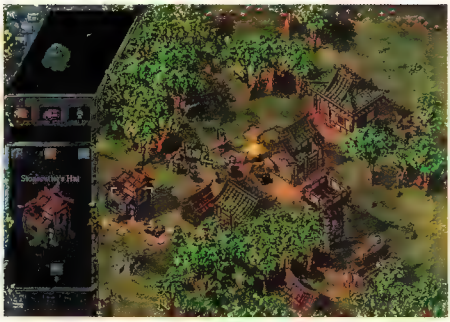
Massed archers are a very effective weapon provided they're protected

As the Danish would no doubt tell you, there's no use having a thriving bacon industry unless you can defend it, and here's where the military comes in. In most other games of this ilk, I'd spend a couple of paragraphs describing army units alone. Here it's simple – there are but five. A swordsman, a spearsman, an archer, a priest and a spy. Making them is not so simple, however. To create soldiers you need a building to smelt iron, then you must have it fashioned into weapons at a forge. Finally, a little settler has to bring the weapons to a barracks where, hey presto, your soldier suddenly appears – providing you have spare folk idling around. Otherwise you need to create more settlers.

To stop you building up armies quickly and charging the enemy early on in the game,



By casting a 'Convert Barbarians' spell my priest, above, can change the loyalties of the little band of blue soldiers across the water



Asians distil rice wine in the brass still at the centre of the above screenshot. Unfortunately it's difficult to find suitable space for paddies

your army's effectiveness is limited outside the home area. Move onto someone else's territory and you could find yourself fighting at just 50 per cent effectiveness. The solution to this is mining (or finding and capturing) gold or jewels. The more lolly you have stockpiled the more your troops are encouraged to fight abroad. With perseverance and plunder you can eventually get troops up to perhaps 90 per cent or greater efficiency on enemy territory. Like everything else in this game, it's all a matter of time and patience.

Priests need a temple in order to be created. Each race has eight unique spells, but all require mana. Unusually, mana is created by building a shrine and getting your local deity drunk. So, for instance, the Romans need a vineyard, a shrine and a temple. You too will need a stiff drink and more than a cursory glance at the instructions to make sense of it all.

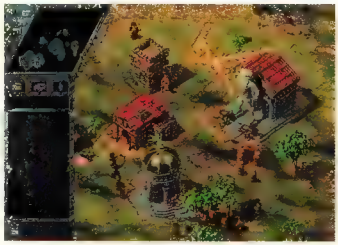
Once it's up and running, the magic is very natty indeed. For instance, the Romans have the ability to convert enemy soldiers to their cause, or to terrify them into running away, while the Egyptians have a spell that changes useful archers into pitifully useless explorers.

All on-screen activity is carried out with tiny animated characters that never fail to amuse. You can watch swine-herders carrying their pigs to market, bakers baking their loaves and soldiers fighting, each in a different screen resolution. Control is via conventional mouse drag-and-select, though a good memory for keyboard shortcuts is an advantage. Trade is rudimentary in the single-player game, being solely between different outposts of your own, but you can engage in barter in a multiplayer game. Territory is gained by placing castles and guard towers around the map, each one marking out an area as yours. To take over someone else's land you have to capture their castles and towers.

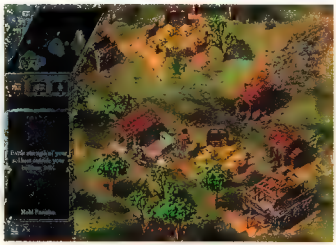
The Settlers III has some problems that should have been ironed out in playtesting. In one buggy instance, two troops out of a total of seven landed on a tiny sandbar beside the shoreline instead of on the island I had sent them to (the rest made landfall). I then found that the unfortunate duo were unable to walk the couple of pixels to the mainland and also refused to be picked up by the boat again. So they stood there, wasted, for the rest of the scenario. But the silliest error was a cock-up on the mission objectives map for the fourth Roman campaign scenario. It was an easily solved problem (symbols were placed incorrectly on the briefing map), and the scenario itself worked a treat, but it's not what you'd expect from so-called finished software. I'm also not a big fan of the online manual, which definitely needs to be printed to avoid bewilderment.

But there are so many things that seem just right about The Settlers III that despite being frustrated now and then I just had to come back for more and more. There is no quick fix in this game. Winning it demands patience, planning, order, strategic thinking and full use of all resources and troops. Initially I thought there were too few troop types – how wrong I was. Rather than constantly giving you ever more powerful weapons, The Settlers III demands that you use the ones you have effectively, with waves of archers supporting swords- and spearsmen, and priests casting spells to distract the enemy. Make no mistake, this game is cute but deadly.

Alan Dykes



A Roman temple in honour of Jupiter



Mmmm... gold. This enhances your army's effectiveness

PROS: Strategic strength and minute detail rarely seen in a real-time game

CONS: If you lack the patience of Job, this will be like a red rag to a bull

RELEASE DATE: Out Now

★★★★★

Conquests Of The Ages

Chrome wasn't built in a day

Unofficial Age Of Empires add-ons really don't stand much chance when compared with Microsoft's own The Rise Of Rome. But an absence of chrome and polish doesn't necessarily indicate a lack of a challenge. So while Conquests Of The Ages hasn't quite the gloss of the official add-on – its campaign briefings, for instance, are a trifle spartan – its four campaigns certainly provide something to think about.

Conquests puts you in the sandals of the Hittites, Assyrians, Phoenicians and Shang in four campaigns of eight scenarios apiece. The scenarios follow the now familiar pattern of gather artefacts, hold ancient sites, destroy a particular enemy building, build a certain number of farms and so on. There are 36 new multiplayer maps, installation of which occurs entirely within the Age Of Empires interface.

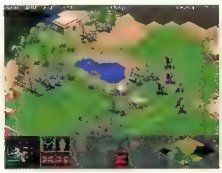
While the Hittite campaign is fairly easy – and a solid reintroduction to how Age Of Empires works – the Shang campaign will put you under pressure from the start. Methodical play will work well in some scenarios; in others, only a pre-emptive strike will secure victory. As yet I've discovered nothing as nail-bitingly tense as, say, the start of the Seven Yellow Priests scenario in the original's Greek campaign.

Raw materials seem plentiful and are conveniently to hand in many of the scenarios, which not only hints at a lack of maturity in design but reduces the vital element of conflict caused by a shortage of essential resources.

Conquests will provide many thought-provoking hours of play. But consider also that if you buy The Rise Of Rome first, you can benefit from the official pack's enhancements, such as unit production queuing at barracks and stables, as well as new units like slingers – all of which then become available in Conquests.

Ian Marsh

China crisis – leave the Shang alone too long and they get too tough to beat. The secret is to hit them hard and hit them early



Hittite and run – torch the Egyptian government centre to topple King Tut

The spoils of victory: Comparing performance against that of your foe

ESSENTIALS:
Aztech New Media, www.aztech.com, £14.99, 1-8 players (2-8 via Internet, LAN or modem), Keyboard, mouse Age Rating: ELSPA 11+

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
Installation: Win95/Win98, requires registered version of Age Of Empires Minimum PC: P90, 16Mb RAM, Quad-speed CD, SVGA, DirectX compatible sound, Advanced Graphics Support: None

DIFFICULTY: Easy

RELEASE DATE: Out Now

★ ★ ★

Virgin Territories

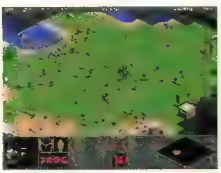
Exploring Virgin Territories is like being on a fungus farm in a power cut. There's no chance of knowing whether you've found a turd or a truffle without tasting everything you pick up.

A little more precisely, Virgin Territories consists of more than 2,000 battles and battle-based campaigns for Age Of Empires written by fans of the game and randomly put onto one handy disc. What it saves you is the chore of entering, say, 'Age Of Empires' into a Web-based search engine or going to http://www.mrgrinch.com and locating whatever scenarios and battles you want free of charge.

Each battle requires installing individually into Age Of Empires using a proprietary interface. There's no documentation – the box contains only a CD in a plain paper sleeve – apart from the scant, sometimes even literate notes from each scenario's creator in the installation program.

The calibre of the battles is perhaps best indicated by the fact that one is the Battle Of The Pyramids, with the French as Greeks arranged in neat squares and Napoleon as a guy in a skirt. It's absolutely manic and serves to illustrate that if you want ancient battles, you're best served by Interactive Magic's Great Battles series rather than Age Of Empires.

Ian Marsh



The Roman games were never as cruel as this. Pity the lions

ESSENTIALS:
East Valley Software, www.eastvalley.com, £12.99, 1-8 players (2-8 via Internet, LAN or modem), Keyboard, mouse Age Rating: ELSPA 11+

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
Installation: Win95/Win98, requires registered version of Age Of Empires Minimum PC: P90, 16Mb RAM, Quad-speed CD, SVGA, DirectX-compatible sound, Advanced Graphics Support: None

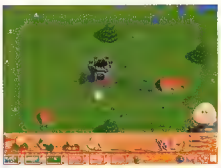
DIFFICULTY: Easy

RELEASE DATE: Out Now

★

Baldies

At war with the follicly challenged



A rare insight into the activities of a group of Baldies at home

Erstwhile software house Gametek released some of the most disappointing games ever to hit the PC – Cyberbikes and Frontier are fine examples – but Baldies is one game it never quite got around to publishing. More fool them, I say!

Baldies is an isometric 3D god game, taking its inspiration from games like Settlers. You have to help a race of little bald guys in dungarees destroy their nasty, hairy, bearded enemies.

Baldies come in four varieties and can be distinguished by the colour of their cute little outfits. Chaps in red overalls are workers, blue ones are the builders who make the houses, white Baldies are the scientists who research weird and wonderful weapons of mass destruction and brown Baldies are soldiers (they just hit people).

You control baldies by moving them to different rooms in their houses, or clicking on them while they are wandering around outside.

When you have enough houses and baldies, you can add and remove land, unleash your funky weapons (there is this cow, for example, which waits for lots of hirsute chaps to come to see it before exploding), or call for an all-out battle to the death where the last man standing wins.

Sold Out software has released this fun, original game for only £5, and at that price, frankly, you'd be mad not to buy it.

Mat Peck

ESSENTIALS:
Sold Out Software, 0171 721 8767, £4.99, 1-4 players (2-4 via IPX network), Mouse Age Rating: ELSPA All Ages

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
Installation: DOS 5.0 or better, Win95/Win98 Minimum PC: 486DX2-66, 8Mb RAM, Dual-speed CD, SVGA, Windows native sound card Advanced Graphics Support: None

DIFFICULTY: Easy

RELEASE DATE: Out Now

★ ★ ★ ★

Small Soldiers Squad Commander

Torch a neighbourhood using dinky plastic marines

Perhaps these buttons will turn off that laser?

Small Soldiers Squad Commander is a Command & Conquer-style strategic combat gamer for younger players. You play either the arrogant Commando Elite toys or the oddly assembled Gorgonite warriors and set out to take control of the neighbourhood by completing a series of missions in various everyday sites around the map (one Gorgonite mission, for example, is to rescue one of your colleagues from the basement of an abandoned house).

The action is viewed from an isometric 3D perspective, and a simple point-and-click interface controls movement.

You begin each mission with a set of toys and you can take more from your toy box (up to the maximum squad size) as the game progresses, but numbers are limited and you should pick the most appropriate characters for each part of the mission.

The levels are well planned, many containing intricate puzzles that require a good deal of thought to solve, so completing missions is not as straightforward as destroying all the enemy toys.

The combat could, perhaps, be a little more varied, possibly with some user interaction, but this minor quibble does not detract from the game in any way.

Squad Commander looks good, plays well, and offers a decent challenge to the younger player. Excellent seasonal gift material, in fact.

Mat Peck

ESSENTIALS:
Hasbro Interactive, 01429 855038, £29.99, 1 player, Keyboard, mouse Age Rating: ELSPA All Ages

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
Installation: Win95/Win98 Minimum PC: P100, 16Mb RAM, Quad-speed CD, DirectX compatible SVGA video, DirectX compatible sound card, Advanced Graphics Support: MMX

DIFFICULTY: Intermediate

RELEASE DATE: Out Now

★ ★ ★ ★

Cyberstorm 2 Corporate Wars

Those Corporate types are at it again

The year is 3569, it's a Tuesday (OK, well maybe it's not a Tuesday) and eight corporations are fighting over a recently discovered jump gate in the Typhoeus system. The scrap basically involves sending out heavily armed tanks, aircraft and mechs to blow the living daylights out of the other corporations' tanks, aircraft and mechs. Sounds like another Command & Conquer clone…

Do not be put off by the fact that Cyberstorm 2 has gone straight to budget release – that should not dissuade you from buying it. It is excellent.

You have a choice of playing either real-time or turn-based and the range of missions, landscapes, research possibilities and vehicle modifications is huge (there are over 300 types of weapon, for example). The game is well organised – it's easy to navigate and well presented – and the missions are sufficiently varied and challenging that you will not get bored after a few fights (enemy AI in the field is well up to standard, possibly even a little too clever at times).

If you have been on Mars for the past three years and do not already own a decent C&C type game, or if you simply want a another good one, you could do a lot worse than Cyberstorm 2.

Mat Peck

Now look at the mess you guys have made of my shed!

Your HERCBase command centre. Pretty isn't it?

ESSENTIALS:
Sierra Originals, 0118 920 9100, £9.99, 1-8 players (2-8 via LAN and Internet), Keyboard, mouse Age Rating: ELSPA All Ages

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
Win95/Win98 Minimum PC: P133, 24Mb RAM, Quad-Speed CD, SVGA, Windows-compatible sound card Advanced Graphics Support: MMX

DIFFICULTY: Intermediate

RELEASE DATE: Out Now

★★★★

Global Domination

Missile Command for the 90s

When Klaus Maria Brandauer and Sean Connery battled for world domination armed with electric-shock joysticks in the Bond film *Never Say Never Again*, they unwittingly spawned the idea behind this lame real-time strategy game. Some might say it was an idea best left alone…

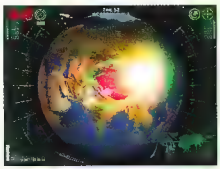
Global Domination depicts something that looks uncannily like the holographic globe of the film – in gloriously flat 2D, with or without the help of a 3D accelerator. The globe rotates rather slickly as you move the mouse, showing the Risk-like territories – the ones you control and the ones you wish to launch missile attacks upon.

Two icons show which territories provide attack and defence sources – missiles, bombers, navies and satellites – and you can go into each to manage the resources of each. If an area is depleted or destroyed, you can switch either source to other territories you control. Beyond this limited resource management element, the rest of the game is like arcade classic Missile Command – but with all the fun taken out.

All you do is left-click to launch missiles at targets and right-click to fire defensive missiles to shoot down incoming warheads. The longer you hold down the mouse button, the bigger the warhead you select. Incoming missiles are either red or grey – red ones are hostile, though given the number of neutral greys that hit my bases, you wouldn't know there was any real difference. If you accidentally click over your own territories you'll automatically launch a missile against yourself which, apart from being an idiotic thing to do, is a handy way of ending this eternity of gaming torture.

I even won one game when I wasn't concentrating – while holding a conversation – and just clicking the mouse from time to time…

Ian Marsh



Nuke the Earth till it glows...

Or divide it up in the map editor

ESSENTIALS:
Psygnosis, 01244 659286, £34.99, 1-16 players (2-16 via LAN or modem), Keyboard, mouse Age Rating: ELSPA All Ages

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
Installation: Win95/Win98 Minimum PC: P133, 32Mb RAM, Quad speed CD, DirectX video, SoundBlaster compatibles, Advanced Graphics Support: D3D, 3Dfx

DIFFICULTY: Easy

RELEASE DATE: Out Now

★

Wall Street Trader '99

Crash course in stocks and shares

Wall Street Trader '99 allows you to buy and sell virtual stocks, shares and commodities on the world markets in an attempt to make yourself worthy of taking over the business empire built up by eccentric English billionaire Lord Fleming.

Wall Street Trader's screens look stunning. Remember the creators of the films *Delicatessen* and *City of Lost Children*, with their strange half-modern, half-antique looking settings? Wall Street Trader looks as if it might have been designed by the same people. There's a touch of Jules Verne's Nautilus Victorian sub-marine about the interface, with its leather and brass trimmings, odd gauges and levers... It's pretty French in other ways too, and its idea of the English language is a bit bizarre at times.

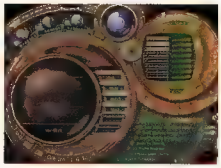
Underneath it all, though, it's a standard trading simulation. Click on whatever it is you want to invest in (oil, yen, sterling, various companies) and drag it to the 'buy' button, then move the lever to indicate how much of your cash your putting into it. Selling is done a similar way.

Various windows allow you to examine trend lines (X and Y axis graphs show the price of stocks, commodities, currencies or indices), or read the latest financial news from around the world. You can also hire corpo-rate spies or buy reports from analysts to give you a better idea of what's happening with a particular industry or company.

The biggest problem with the game is that you have to com-plete different 'missions', one by one, with each one introducing new aspects. I'd have preferred a system where you could jump straight in at the deep end...

Nevertheless it's a fun game with an attractive interface that has some real educational value.

Martin Croft



Unusual French screen design

Get some inside information

ESSENTIALS:
Monte Cristo Multimedia, 01322 665652, £39.99, 1-4 players (2-4 via Internet and LAN), Keyboard, mouse Age Rating: ELSPA All Ages

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
Installation: Win95/Win98/WinNT 4.0 with Service Pack 3.0 or later, Minimum PC: Pentium 75, 16Mb RAM, Quad-speed CD, SVGA, Windows compatible soundcard Advanced Graphics Support: None

DIFFICULTY: Easy

RELEASE DATE: Out Now

★ ★ ★

Deo Gratias

Most god games limit the player's sphere of influence to a single town or settlement. Not Deo Gratias. It lets you create your own universe, planets and races. You can endear your subjects to you or annoy them with a few well-placed earthquakes and, well, acts of god.

A fine premise, but where this idea loses some of its appeal is in the implementation. Deo Gratias allows you to create worlds, opulate them with various races, nurture those races through their social development, defend them from other gods and grow strong on their adoration and faith. What you can't do is work at a low level. For example, you cannot control the construction of buildings, roads and so on.

Although there are sufficient godly challenges to work through, this lack of hands-on ruling, along with the somewhat complex structure of the game, takes much of the fun out of god-hood.

Alex Cruickshank

Even a god needs an image

ESSENTIALS:
Cryo Interactive, 01926 315 552, £39.99, 1-100 players (2-100 via LAN or Internet), Keyboard, mouse, Age Rating: ELSPA All Ages

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
Installation: Win95/Win98 Minimum PC: P166, 32Mb RAM, Quad-speed CD, SVGA, Windows-compatible sound card, Advanced Graphics Support: None

DIFFICULTY: Intermediate

RELEASE DATE: Out Now

★ ★

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It's been a year of revolutions – all of them welcome

What a year it has been in the sports game arena. While 1997 ushered in the dawn of a new era of graphics in sports games, 1998 saw this dawn turn into full daylight with the likes of EA Sports' football, American football and NHL games. Even areas as humble as fishing got a major overhaul looks-wise.

Another major revolution was in control – the mouse has come into its own in golf and eight buttons are being used effectively on gamepads for football. The third advance is in multiplayer gaming over the Internet. Golf has always led the way in this arena, and indeed still does, but Internet gaming has expanded to embrace tennis, football and American sports – check out Actua Soccer at www.wireplay.com for instance. Sports gamers have never had it so good.

Here are my recommendations for sports games across the entire spectrum of popular interest (apologies if I've missed out anything). I've also included a included a 'Wait For' heading because I believe that the two games mentioned under it will be well worth holding on for and should be available by February at the latest. The material in 'Essential Kit' is not actually that essential if you're playing a football management game or International Cricket Captain, but for most of the others listed, a 3D card is highly desirable and a gamepad is a must for football.

1998 will be remembered as the year that sports sims crept uncannily close to their live TV equivalents. And in 1999 they will be even more so. Speaking of 1999, has anyone seen strange, crane-like spaceships hovering near the moon yet?

ESSENTIAL GAMES
The Golf Pro (Empire)
FIFA 99 (EA Sports)
International Cricket Captain (Empire)
Actua Tennis (Gremlin)
Madden NFL 99 (EA Sports)
Bass Masters Classic: Tournament Edition (THQ)
Brunswick Circuit Pro Bowling (THQ)

WAIT FOR:
Championship Manager 3 (Eidos)
NBA 99 (EA Sports)

ESSENTIAL KIT
Microsoft Sidewinder Gamepad (Bill Gates)
12Mb 3Dfx Voodoo II Graphics Card (Orchid, Diamond, Guillemot, Techworks – all the same basic capability, look for best price and fave software bundle)
A Luca Vialli Punchbag (He's so smug)

Alan Dykes
Comments or questions on sports games? Write to Alan or email him on alan_dykes@zd.com

Player Manager Season 98-99

The boy's done great

Ron Manager bursts through the midfield for Watford

Player Manager was a legend. The first real-time football management sim to hit the Amiga, it's fair to say it took the emerging computer soccer world by storm. Recently the series hasn't fared quite so well on the PC, but now Player Manager Season 98-99 steps into the spotlight to try to recapture some of the old maestro's past glories.

Anco has chosen to concentrate on the action close to home and you can play as any team from the domestic English and Scottish leagues and from Premier to Conference level. A smooth, logically organised interface takes you through all the day-to-day management decisions and once you probe beneath the surface, you'll find extensive options for designing custom tactics and an innovative player search and transfer system, which allows you to construct some really solid football squads.

There's an uncomplicated, but very decent match engine, which can be viewed in 2D or 3D, but what impresses most of all is the level of responsiveness and feedback throughout. You always feel as though your hands are very firmly on the managerial tiller. By concentrating on the core areas that interest most discerning soccer supremos – the tactics and personnel – the developers have gone back to basics and succeeded admirably.

Occasional minor bugs may irritate, but on the whole, Season 98-99 is a highly agreeable and very rewarding management experience. A very welcome return to form from the Anco boys.

John Houlihan

ESSENTIALS: Anco, 01322 292513, £27.99, 1 player, Keyboard, mouse Age Rating: ELSPA All Ages

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS: Installation: Win95/Win98 Minimum PC: 486 DX66 (P120 for match sequences), 16Mb RAM (32Mb for match sequences), Quad-speed CD, DirectX 6 compatible graphics and sound Advanced Graphics Support: None

DIFFICULTY: Intermediate

RELEASE DATE: Out Now

★★★★

Michael Owen's World League Soccer '99

It's got the looks

LABEL: E dos
TELEPHONE: 0181 636 3000
WEB: www.e.dos com
DEVELOPER: S licon Dreams
PRICE: £39 99
NO. OF PLAYERS: 1-4 (2-4 via serial link and modem)
DIFFICULTY: Easy
AGE RATING: ELSPA All Ages

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

Installation Win95/W n98 **Minimum PC** P133 **Minimum RAM** 16Mb **CD** Quad-speed **Graphics** DirectX 6 and compat.bles **Sound** DirectX 6 and compat bles **Control** Keyboard, Gamepad **Advanced Graphics Support** D3D, 3Dfx

The man himself – Michael Owen stalks the penalty area

Michael Owen is one of the hottest properties to emerge in English soccer for many a long moon and after such a successful World Cup it was inevitable that a publisher would lure the Liverpool wunderkind into signing on the dotted line. Eidos won that particular race and now wee Mike is fronting World League Soccer '99, the successor to WLS '98, Silicon Dream's good looking playable outing, which was a real contender in last year's arcade soccer stakes.

One of the series' strengths is its comprehensive approach and WLS '99 contains a full roster of the world's premier club sides and players, as well as full international squads and the usual variety of custom league and cup competitions. But the emphasis is firmly on quality gameplay and arcade-style action and once it trots out onto the park, WLS '99 certainly doesn't disappoint.

Lining up a wicked, dipping free-kick

WLS '98 contained some really gorgeous football environments and WLS '99 continues this tradition with some sumptuous stadium and lighting effects and ultra realistic in-game graphics. The match viewing system remains among the best in the business, giving you every conceivable angle on the match. The players are also as solid and chunky as ever, with new kit and face textures improving the level of realism and they also perform an excellent variety of moves in the motion capture sequences which come courtesy of Michael Owen. Splendid as it looks, though, one consequence of these enhancements is that WLS '99 is much more demanding on your system and you'll need a hefty machine with a good graphics card (ideally Voodoo 2) to enjoy its full graphical splendour at a reasonable pace.

What other improvements does WLS '99 offer? Well, the control system has changed slightly, with extended options for each basic move and while initially quite tricky to master, it does reward constant practice with a good degree of flexibility. The excellent tactical model has been retained from last year's version, but you can now give player individual orders like man-to-man marking and improved player AI means even more sophisticated strategies are on offer. The welcome introduction of authentic player names and squads also removes one of the few niggling problems from '98.

A highly playable and indeed enjoyable football outing, WLS '99 remains a strong option at the arcade end of the division. Seasoned football veterans will enjoy its lush visuals and gameplay, while newcomers and younger players will revel in the immediate console-style accessibility. Looks like wee Michael has bagged another winner.

John Houlihan

PROS: Great visuals, solid console style gameplay

CONS: Chugs a bit on slow machines, control system requires practice to master

RELEASE DATE: Out Now

★ ★ ★ ★

Actua Soccer 3

The pitch is back

LABEL: Gremlin
TELEPHONE: 0114 263 9900
WEB: www.gremlin.co.uk
DEVELOPER: In-house
PRICE: £39.99
NO. OF PLAYERS: 1-64 (2 via serial link and modem, 2-8 via LAN and 2-64 via Internet)
DIFFICULTY: Intermediate
AGE RATING: ELSPA All Ages

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

Installation Win95/Win98 **Minimum PC** P166 **Minimum RAM** 16Mb **CD** Quad-speed **Graphics** Direct X6 and compatibles **Sound** Direct X6 and compatibles **Control** Keyboard, gamepad **Advanced Graphics Support** D3D, 3Dfx

Splendid match views fitted as standard

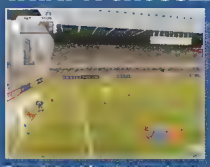
With a World Cup in the summer and another Premiership season now in full swing, you'd think footy addicts would be satiated with the beautiful game. Could we even be experiencing, dare I say it… too much football? Of course, that's an absurd idea.

No, throughout this feast of football, we've just been in training, limbering up and making careful preparation to confront the annual glut of footy titles which traditionally flood the market around Christmas. Last month FIFA 99 leapt boldly onto the park and achieved instant Classic status for its stunning looks and enhanced gameplay and now the other heavyweight of the PC football scene, Actua Soccer 3, is set to make its debut. Heady times indeed for the PC football fan.

Even before it sets boot on pitch, Actua Soccer 3 clearly has a strong pedigree and last year's model, Actua 2, won plaudits for its exceptional playability and highly addictive gameplay. From the off, Actua 3 certainly seems set to carry on this tradition and at the heart of the game lies an impressive 3D engine, which although not quite possessing the striking beauty of FIFA, is nevertheless authentic, pacy and as slick as David Beckham's Brylcreemed barnet. Splendid match views, excellent motion-capture (barring the odd, minor glitch) and authentically modelled stadia, plus a host of subtle in-game effects, really build a great big match atmosphere and a thoroughly convincing and highly rewarding soccer experience.

Once you're step out onto the pitch, gameplay reigns supreme and Actua 3 is easily among the most instantly satisfying and playable footy games ever. This is in no small measure due to the exceptional control system,

WHAT A CROSSER!


Zoom in to pick out a target man at corners

He waits patiently in the box...

Picks up a perfect ball...

And blazes it wide ... what a donkey!

Instant stats rate your player's performance

which has been refined to take advantage of the advances in gamepad technology over the past year. Eight buttons, rather than four, now control all your player's actions, but the system is as smooth and intuitive as ever and allows you to play some really delightful, free-flowing football with new moves like crossing, backheels and even diving, adding even more depth to your repertoire of skills. Player AI and positioning also seem to have been tightened up, the passing and movement patterns are splendid and you get a real sense that tactical and personnel changes make a difference to your team's performance, heightening the level of realism.

So far, so excellent. But how does Actua 3 fare in the dressing room? Well one of the few problems with Actua 2 was its rather limited scope: after you'd conquered the 64 international teams on offer, there wasn't a great deal left to achieve. Actua 3 remedies this deficiency by introducing over 10,000 players from 450 authentic domestic club sides, plus full international squads and a number of intriguing custom teams.

And it's there! ... Ronnie bags a blinder

A combination of an extensive team and player editor, plus a basic but useful transfer system, means you can also design and set up virtually any team from the modern or classic eras and with a full range of options for league, cup and custom competitions, this adds considerably to the overall depth of the piece, as well as providing a more satisfying long-term challenge.

The computer teams on offer provide a decent workout for your soccer skills, but of course where Actua 3 really excels is in multiplayer mode. Having had a chance to test it out on LAN, modem and Internet, I can report that it is both perfectly playable and thoroughly enjoyable on all three. The howls of delight, yells of derision and

deep levels of involvement coming from the 32 participants at the recent and keenly contested Actua 3 Wireplay tournament (Watford knocked out in the Quarters by last year's runner-up, after an earlier shock 1-0 win over Germany, since you ask) were certainly concrete proof of Actua 3's magnificent multiplayer pedigree.

Gremlin has made a truly great playable football game in Actua 3. The control system is excellent, the graphics are more than decent and a host of new options has increased both the depth and overall appeal. Yet Actua 3 succeeds because at heart, it once again offers such an intensely playable and highly engaging festival of football.

Inevitably, of course, the question will be: do I buy Actua 3 or FIFA 99 this Christmas? Well without wanting to sit on the fence, it really does depend on what kind of game you want. FIFA 99 is beautiful to behold and so polished that it could almost be called Sim Football 99, but Actua 3 is fantastically playable, highly addictive and at least as entertaining in its own right, especially in multiplayer mode.

Why settle for one, when you could double your pleasure by bagging both and tucking into a veritable feast of football this festive season?

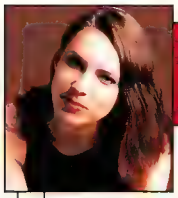
John Houlihan

PROS: Fantastically playable, good looking, extremely satisfying soccer

CONS: Occasional, minor motion-capture glitches

RELEASE DATE: Out Now

★★★★★



Is Baldur's Gate the best roleplaying game for seven years? You better believe it

Baldur's

So big it hurts...

About seven years ago I bought a game. For the month it took to play it, it took over my life. Every day I would get home from work, turn on my PC, load up Ultima VII: The Black Gate and sit there for hours, transfixed. My boyfriend at the time, a programmer, would wander in occasionally and make comments like: 'How can you bear to look at that? The scrolling's so jerky.' It was, of course, but I didn't care. Nor did I care about the numerous bugs the game contained – I'd just find a way to play around them and carry on as before.

So why was I not more critical of the game's imperfections? One magazine had awarded it a paltry 3/10 for those very reasons. For me, though, they were insignificant. Ultima VII was one of those rare games that had the ability to ensnare you in its multi-layered plot and drag you into a magical world from which you had absolutely no desire to escape. So involved did I become with the characters, their world and their story, that on completing the game I felt quite bereft. Just over a year later, and shortly after I had begun reviewing PC games for a living, Origin released Ultima VII Part 2: Serpent Isle. It had fewer bugs than its predecessor, but, being based on the same game engine, it had the same jerky old scrolling. It also had the same magic, and, thanks to a storyline which pulled no punches, prompted me to feel uncharacteristically emotional. Even now I look back on these two games with nostalgia, and this, more than smooth scrolling, is what makes these games classic.

So why am I writing about a couple of old games from six or seven years ago? Because it has taken that long for anyone to come up with a roleplaying game that is in anything like the same league. Sadly, that company is not Origin – after the bland, platform-game style Ultima VIII: Pagan, I fear that the Ultima series has lost its way.

No, that company is BioWare, a relatively inexperienced developer whose only previous title was the Mech-style robot game, Shattered Steel. In giving us Baldur's Gate, BioWare has almost single-handedly revived the roleplaying genre. Baldur's Gate is an epic on the Ultima scale – a game with an intricately woven plot, lively characters, over a hundred sub-quests and some genuinely pretty graphics. It isn't perfect – it moves a little slowly at times, but I have found it increasingly hard to tear myself away from it at the end of each day. When you play so many games for a living, you see the really special games happen along all too infrequently. But I'm nothing less than fulsomely enthusiastic about Baldur's Gate. After all, I've waited seven years for this game. I'm not going to nit-pick.

Cal Jones
Comments or questions on adventure & roleplaying games? Write to Cal or email her on cal_jones@zd.com

LABEL: Interplay
TELEPHONE: 01628 423666
WEB: www.bioware com
DEVELOPER: BioWare
PRICE: £39 99
NO. OF PLAYERS: 1-6 players (2-6 via TCP/IP, IPX, null modem and serial connections)
DIFFICULTY: Intermediate
AGE RATING: ELSPA 15+

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

Installation Win95 with DirectX 5.0 or greater **Minimum PC** P120 **Minimum RAM** 16Mb **CD** Quad-speed **Graphics** 2Mb PCI SVGA card **Sound** DirectX compatible **Control** Mouse **Advanced Graphics Support** None

Baldur's Gate is not perfect. It's sluggish at times, and occasionally one of your characters might do something stupid, like standing in a corner instead of following the rest of the party. But quite frankly, it doesn't matter. Weighed against the game's multitude of plus points, these are but trifling matters.

First and foremost, this game is huge. Do not expect to finish it in less than 100 hours. If, like many roleplayers, you enjoy seeking out all the game has to offer by exploring every square inch of every location, and completing every one of the hundred or more sub-quests, then you're looking at closer to 200 hours. Simply put, Baldur's Gate is offering real value for money.

Size, however, isn't always a straightforward guarantee of a good time – at least, that's what men have been telling me for years. But Baldur's Gate offers plenty of quality along with the quantity. I found it extraordinarily compelling, to the extent where I was reluctant to turn off my PC and go home at the end of the day. Now, I freely admit that, with around six years' experience of playing games for a living, the novelty of gaming as a new entertainment pastime has worn off somewhat. However, Baldur's Gate had me coming in to my PC early and at weekends, and leaving a good deal later. I just couldn't leave the damn game alone. I found myself drawn in ever-deeper with each twist in the plot, so that it took a great deal of

Apparently, the characters' appearances were based on the friends and family of the BioWare team. Now whose relative might this be?

Gate

The gnoll, a humanoid dog-type race, are not that hard to kill individually, but they make up for that in numbers

Inns are a good place to pick up quests, rest, drink beer and, in some places, buy and sell items

willpower to stop playing the game and start writing the review. It's one of those games where you think, right, I'll just play for a couple of hours, but two hours turn rapidly into ten. You'll start imposing deadlines like 'OK, I'll just finish these mines and then I'll stop.' But then you finish the mine section and you'll think, 'Oh, I only need a couple of hundred more experience points and I can go up a level.' So you go off and look for some monsters to vanquish. And while you're out in the wilds fighting monsters, you'll come across another character who entreats you to perform a small quest for him, so off you go and do that. And before you know it, the birds are tweeting and it's almost time to go to work. That's if you don't ring in sick so you can play it some more…

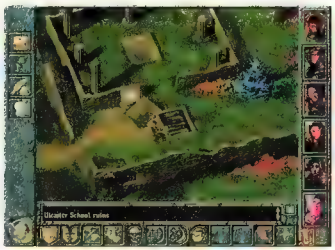
Yes, it's that good. But what is it? If you missed out on last issue's extensive development feature (Issue 24, page 64) you might well wonder what the hell I'm waffling on about. Well, Baldur's Gate is the sort of role-playing game that people like me have been waiting years and years for. If you get a lovely, warm nostalgic feeling when you look back at games like Ultima VI or VII or the Dark Sun games and say things like: 'They don't make 'em like they used to,' then prepare to get very excited about Baldur's Gate. It's a third-person perspective game in which you view the landscape from above, and instead of controlling just the one character, as has become fashionable with roleplaying games developers of late, you control a party of up to six.

Very much like the Ultimas (up until the lamentable Ultima VIII, anyway), you start off with just the one character: you. This is a character you roll up from the beginning, choosing your race, character class (that's profession to non-roleplaying aficionados), name and portrait. Being based on Advanced Dungeons & Dragons rules (AD&D) you are limited to human, elf, half-elf, dwarf, halfling and gnome characters, and the basic classes of fighter, cleric, rogue and mage. However, there are quite a few variations on the basic classes, such as ranger and paladin, druid, bard and specialist mages such as illusionists and necromancers. Whatever you choose, bear in mind that to start with you are a relative weakling who is going to have a tough time fending off the monsters and assassins who want to put a premature end to your adventures. Better get yourself a few friends, pronto!

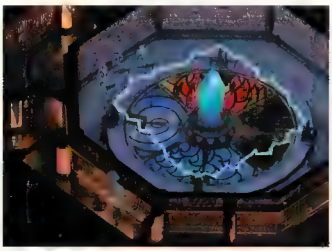
The game starts in the town of Candlekeep, where you were raised as an orphan by the scholarly Gorion. One day he tells you to pack your things because you must both leave immediately. A run-in with a couple of low-grade hit men convinces you that he's right, though why someone would want you dead is a complete mystery to you.

As you leave Candlekeep, you are set upon by more evil-doers, but while Gorion is killed, you manage to escape. Suddenly you find yourself on your own in a troubled land overrun by monsters and bandits, and in the throes of political upheaval.

As you begin to explore, you learn that, for some reason, goods made of iron are becoming increasingly rare. The iron mines of Nashkel are

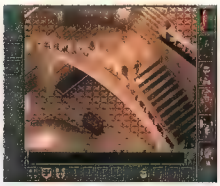


The abandoned school at Ulcaster is full of treasure, but also full of nasty, hungry creatures



The mage at High Hedge will buy and sell magical items, provided you don't annoy him too much

You can enter pretty much every building you come across (even if it means picking the lock)



A balanced party is vital to your survival, and that includes a good magic user. Gnoll flambe, anyone?

producing inferior ore that yields weak weapons and implements, and thanks to bandit activity along the length of the Sword Coast, even these fragile tools are rare. As an adventurer, you find yourself drawn into the intrigue as you perform a series of what seem to be unrelated tasks. However, you soon discover that a greater evil lies behind the troubles -- and behind your unknown identity.

To start with, Baldur's Gate is tough. With few hit points and even fewer companions, you're nothing more than monster fodder. Although Gorion tells you to run to the Friendly Inn, north of Candlekeep, the assassin who awaits is initially too strong for you to deal with, unless you get especially lucky. Instead, I chose to explore the other areas of the Sword Coast, picking up experience points and recruiting companions, until I was up to the more interesting tasks such as clearing the Nashkel mines of monsters and infiltrating the bandits' secret camp.

Most of the experience points you earn will come from slaying various monsters in combat. However, there are occasions when avoiding combat will earn you more points than besting your foe – for example, talking your way out of a fight with the ogre, Larz, in a tavern will bring you whopping 900 points.

More points – and, indeed gold – can be gained from carrying out quests for certain people. Not all quests are vital to your goal, but most are at least helpful. In some cases, a character may agree to join you if you help him fulfil some quest of his own. Delay that for too long and he might well leave, or in the case of one particular character, attack you. In another instance, characters can bicker or get upset if they don't like each other. At one stage I found myself with a pair of characters whose goals mutually opposed each other: one wished to rescue a certain character, while the other wanted her killed. In such cases, it's better to dump one instead of trying to please them both, which is impossible.

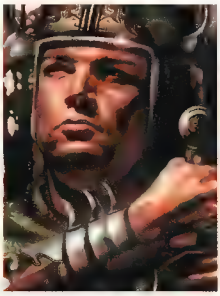
All these deft little touches are part of what makes the game so rich. That, and the fact that even if you are failing to make major progress with your overall quest, fulfilling small goals such as minor quests and character advancement, keeps you interested.

For me, Baldur's Gate is a game I've been awaiting for years. It is certainly the best true roleplaying game I have played since Ultima VII Part 2: Serpent Isle back in 1993, and I hope it gives other developers the incentive they need to make more games of this kind.

While there have been plenty of good first-person roleplaying titles, the party-based game has been neglected for too long. My hat goes off to BioWare for resurrecting it with such consummate style.

Cal Jones

You can choose from a number of different faces for your character, or even import your own if you prefer



Ajantis, a Paladin, is one of the many non-player characters you can recruit

PROS: Enormous, epic, extraordinary. The party-based roleplaying game returns in style

CONS: It's a bit slow. Lots of disc swapping

RELEASE DATE: 18 December

★★★★★

what I want...

Pentium II

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RE-RELEASES

COMPILATIONS

STAR TREK: FEDERATION COMPILATION

(Interplay, £29.99 ★★★★)
Out Now
This pack brings together five *Star Trek* games culled from both the Interplay and MicroProse back catalogues. Containing 10 CDs in total (five of which are dedicated to Starfleet Academy), the compilation is a huge blast of roleplaying, action, strategy, space sim and sci-fi melodrama. As well as Starfleet Academy it includes the add-on pack Chechov's Lost Mission, the best of the bunch Star Trek TNG: A Final Unity, and the now slightly longer in the tooth space combat sims Star Trek 25th Anniversary and Star Trek Generations

THE BIGGEST NAMES, THE BEST GAMES

(Electronic Arts, £24.99 ★★★★★)
Out December 11
Easily the strongest compilation pack around – containing at least four bone fide classic games: two of Bullfrog's finest – Theme Hospital and Dungeon Keeper, as well as SimCity 2000 and Warhammer Dark Omen. And as if that wasn't enough there's also Need For Speed II Special Edition and Nuclear Strike. Terrific value, and also a nicely varied bundle. Highly reccommended

SIMULATION

X-WING VS TIE FIGHTER & BALANCE OF POWER CAMPAIGNS

Out 8 January
(LucasArts Classic, £29.99 ★★★★)
As a space-combat game X-Wing Vs Tie Fighter was not restricted like its predecessors to single player. It added the tantalising prospect of multiplayer co-op furballs and head-on dogfights. Even in single-player the game offers several types of melees including dogfights, furballs and turkey shoots, where you are pitted against good quality opponent AI in an equally impressive 3D universe. This repackaged duo also includes the Balance Of Power add-on campaigns

FORMULA 1 GRAND PRIX 2

(Power Plus, £12.99 ★★★)
Out Now
Possibly the most commercially sucessful racing game thus far produced for the PC. Even now, despite being well over three years old, the game still retains some sense of being the benchmark in sheer playability for others to aspire to. Its lack of 3D hardware support makes it look a little old hat – but it still plays a belter! The game only left the Top 30 this summer after 87 weeks on the chart. Amazingly, this is the first time the game has been released at budget price

ACTION

DARK FORCES 2: JEDI KNIGHT & JEDI KNIGHT: MYSTERIES OF THE SITH

(LucasArts Classic, £29.99 ★★★)
Out Now
This double-pack includes LucasArts' highly successful but slightly mis-conceived action fest together with its add-on missions pack – Mysteries Of The Sith. What most action games didn't have Jedi Knight tried to implement – such as a storyline and variation between strategy and hack-and-slash. Unfortunately it forgot to add of the basics, such as fluid animations backed with an impressive game engine. A capital Quake clone none the less thanks to its *Star Wars* ambience and lengthy gameplay

QUAKE II: QUAKEMASS

(Activision, £19.99 ★★★★★)
Out Now
Almost exactly – to the day – a year after its first release, Quake II gets reissued at mid-price. A smaller price now to pay for the game that still reigns (Half-Life willing) as the undisputed king of multiplayer gaming. Not exactly toward the cheap end of budget, but nevertheless an essential purchase if you don't have it already. Classic first-person action

CANNON FODDER 2

(Sold Out, £4.99 ★★★★)
Out Now
Following Sold Out's recent success with the original Cannon Fodder, here's the sequel. It's a fast-paced shoot 'em-up, with reckless objectives and madcap animated graphics. You play the leader of a small group of heavily armed soldiers sent in to kill endless supplies of the enemy, demolish their homes and generally destroy everything in sight, using a combination of bullets, hand grenades and the occasional rocket. Slapstick gameplay and twisted humour make the game absurdly addictive

OUTLAWS

(LucasArts Classic, £9.99 ★★)
Out January 8
LucasArts' action-western affair still retains the initial disappointment felt when the game was first re-released! A dated engine, flawed gameplay and an excess number of rather shoddy 2D sprites make the game graphically tiresome. Relentless repetetive puzzles and uninspiring levels. Rather better in multiplayer, however. It's (not so) good, it's bad and it's ugly

PANDEMONIUM 2

(Ubi Soft Classique, £12.99 ★★★)
Out Now
The sequel to the popular Playstation side-scroller. Set in a surreal landscape of giant spiders and evil clowns, Pandemonium 2 is hardly original. Not recommended for the serious gamer, but simple, enjoyable action. Mario on acid.

REDLINE RACER

(Ubi Soft Classique, £12.99 ★★★★)
Out Now
Although action is delivered at breakneck speed, the game falls short of the variety offered by other titles such as Moto Racer. Points are also lost for realism since the attributes given to bikes pre-race seem to bear little resemblance to the their performance on the track. Quick, exciting action, however

VIRTUAL KARTS

(Sold Out, £4.99 ★★★)
Out Now
The graphics are hardly outstanding, and the control system isn't exactly revolutionary, but it's effective nevertheless. Playing and installing the game won't require a degree in programming, and it doesn't need the latest hardware. Simple and enjoyable, pick-up-and-play gaming

TUROK: DINOSAUR HUNTER

(Black Market, £9.99 ★★)
Out Now
Mostly shows up these days in D3D graphics accelerator tests

RE-RELEASES

for reasons no less unfathomable than that it chucks out a frame count when told. Otherwise an adequate, but fundamentally rather crude first-person shooter with a terrible lizard theme. You can take that whichever way you like. Fine to play for a while, but essentially repetitive and eclipsed by other 3D corridor shooters

ULTIMATE RACE PRO

(Hasbro, £12.99 ★★★★)
Out Now
Originally arriving on the shelves alongside titles such as TOCA and F1 Racing, Ultim@te Race Pro had a tough crowd to beat. Although it can't live up to the realism and accuracy of its opponent titles, Kalisto's arcade racer is quick, smooth, pretty and, overall, fine fun

STRATEGY & WARGAMING

NETSTORM

(Essential Collection, £???? ★★★)
Out Now
This online real-time strat has some frustrating elements but it's clear that a lot of effort had been put into ensuring the multiplayer environment is as seamless as possible. The island structure of the landscape makes bridge building the key and the fact you often end up with only a tiny gap separating you and the enemy but not the right shaped bridge section to fill it is quite annoying. That and the lack of ground troops. Otherwise an addictive, well-made online-ready title

CIVIL WAR GENERALS 2

(Sierra Originals, £9.99 ★★★)
Out Now
There's nothing particularly impressive about Sierra's turn-based wargame – graphics aren't breathtaking and gameplay isn't exceptionally innovative. It's just a solid, entertaining strategy title. If you're a wargame enthusiast then CWG2 offers hours of quality gameplay. If you aren't, it's really nothing special

DARK REIGN

(Essential Collection, £9.99 ★★★)
Out Now
Activision's real-time strategy C&C-beater, er, didn't. It came out around the same time as Total Annihilation. It's all the kind of high-tech action you'd expect but it never did square up to Cavedog's best efforts. A good-un but there's better

LORDS OF THE REALM

(Sierra Originals, £9.99 ★★★)
Out Now
A magnificent cattle-and-battle simulation four years ago, Lords Of The Realm remains a solid game but is now drastically showing its age graphically and in its battle scenarios. Its basic level is turn-based economic management, its second level is turn-based warfare, and you're better off letting the computer decide the latter. It's all set in medieval England as you try to gain the crown from five other Lords. If your PC is a 486 this is highly recommended

STAR WARS: SUPREMACY

(LucasArts Classic, £29.99 ★★★)
Out 8 January
Command & Conquer in *Star Wars* environs. Win control from the empire of up to 200 planetary systems in the *Star Wars* galaxy. Set about bringing new planets under your sway by either force or diplomacy. Build mines and refineries on planets, extract useful resources and then create fleets, train military units and put them to good use. Disappointing flaws in the game AI meant Supremacy didn't achieve its full potential. This reissue is cheaper – but not that cheap

UPRISING

(Ubi Soft Classique, £9.99 ★★★)
Out Now
You begin the game as a rebel commander, controlling your troops from the battlefield, in order to destroy the evil imperial empire which has taken control of most of the universe. A tough task given such limited troop control, and such advanced enemy AI. The depth of gameplay is impressive, combining driving tanks into war, and strategically deploying your troops, but the lack of control over your army remains annoying

ADVENTURE & RPG

LANDS OF LORE II

(EA Classics, £12.99 ★★★★★)
Out Now
One of last year's few decent roleplaying games, Lands Of Lore II was a significant improvement on its predecessor with technical advancements and improved in-game graphics. Moderate but effective visuals and an amusing plot make this a top-value offering

ADVERTISING INDEX

Activision	16,17	www.activision.co.uk
Alternative Software	99	www.alhvare.demon.co.uk
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S N	84	★★★
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Michael Owen's Wor d League Soccer 99	111	★★★★
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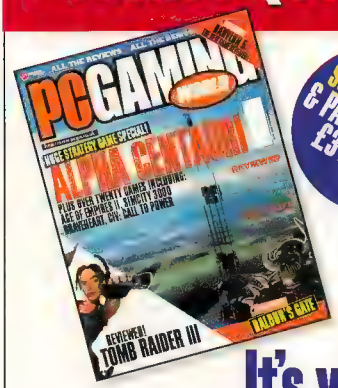
ADVENTURE & ROLEPLAYING		
Baldur's Gate	114	★★★★★

'I WANT THE LOT FOR UNDER THIRTY QUID!'



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RECENTLY ★★★★★ RECOMMENDED

Here's a selection of recently reviewed titles that received our highest recommendation

HALF-LIFE

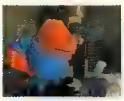
Sierra (Action) Reviewed: January 99 issue

Cutting-edge first-person shooter with plot! Valve's masterpiece can happily lay claim to being the game of 1998 – and one whose influence on other developers is as lasting as the game is to play. An essential purchase

WARGASM

Infogrames (Action) Reviewed: January 99 issue

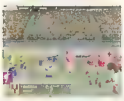
Intoxicating mixture of real-time strategy and explosive action. Compared with the surfeit of flaccid Command & Conquer or tank sim clones currently clogging the shelves, this is 3D gaming nirvana



GRIM FANDANGO

LucasArts (Adv/RPG) Reviewed: January 99 issue

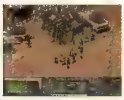
A delicious confection of Mexican myth and film noir, with what's perhaps the sharpest, most entertaining script ever written for an adventure. The best adventure to come out of LucasArts – including Monkey Island…



FIFA 99

EA Sports (Sports) Reviewed: January 99 issue

Now faster, smarter, and better looking, this is the most brilliantly realised football game yet. Sheer football heaven – and there's even a funky soundtrack headed by Fatboy Slim's Rockafeller Skank. Wonderful to play



FALLOUT 2

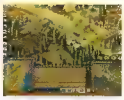
Interplay (Adv/RPG) Reviewed: January 99 issue

Fine successor to a very slick, stylish and original role-playing game – with puzzles varying from the hair-raising to the hilarious. Who would have thought the apocalypse could be so much fun?

MADDEN NFL 99

EA Sports (Sports) Reviewed: January 99 issue

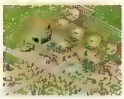
Everything you could ever want from an American football game. Changed almost out of recognition for 99 with greater management logistics, vastly improved play options and control. A great challenge



RAILROAD TYCOON II

Take 2 (Strat/War) Reviewed: January 99 issue

Superb simulation, top-notch looks and addictive gameplay. A magnificent achievement, wortny of comparison with the very best of the genre. Book your ticket to strategy heaven now



CAESAR III

Sierra (Strat/War) Reviewed: January 99 issue

Maybe not exactly revolutionary, but delivers great long-term gameplay and a tough challenge. Immensely challenging – ideal for those who really like to think when they are gaming

OTHER RECENT ★★★★★ RELEASES

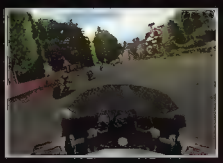
Here's a selection of recently reviewed titles that received our highest recommendation

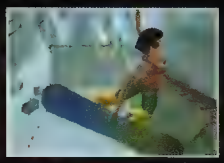
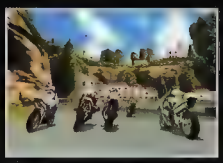
Title	Publisher	Game Type	Reviewed
NHL 99	EA Sports	Sports	December 98
Klingon Honor Guard	MicroProse	Action	December 98
Colin McRae Rally	Codemasters	Simulation	November 98
Hardwar	Gremlin	Simulation	October 98
Final Fantasy VII	Eidos	Adv/RPG	September 98
X COM - Interceptor	MicroProse	Simulation	September 98
TA: The Core Contingency	GT Interactive	Strat/War	July 98
Unreal	GT Interactive	Action	July 98
World Cup 98	EA Sports	Sports	July 98
Starship Titanic	Zablac	Adv/RPG	June 98
Forsaken	Acclaim	Action	June 98
The God Pro	Empire	Sports	May 98
Warhammer: Dark Omen	Electronic Arts	Strat/War	April 98
Quake	Activision	Action	March 98
VR Pool 2	Interplay	Classics & Puzzles	March 98
Wing Commander: Prophecy	Origin	Simulation	March 98

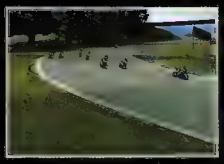
"The effective combination of new technology and addictive gameplay"

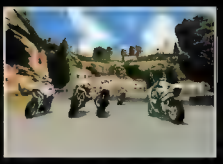
A new company has been launched in the UK. Incorporating the talents of Midas, Interactive Entertainment and Teque Interactive — creators of Castrol Honda Superbike World Champions — the groups have now formed a new company: Midas Interactive Entertainment Ltd

Midas has grown out of long-term business relationships between independent developers, distributors and publishers and is a response to the global expansion of the major corporations. As the large publishers concentrate their efforts on a small number of key products and sequels, Midas aims to aid independent development companies to get a better deal for their products from the global market. To this end Midas has adopted a three-pronged approach to product distribution, from full price £24.99/£29.99 games, mid-price £9.99 games and finally budget games at an incredible £2.99 SSP. Midas aims to bring quality to the games-playing public while maximising sales for the developers and publishers.







Castrol Honda Superbike World Champions

The most accurate motorcycle sim ever made

Castrol Honda entered the World Superbike arena in 1994 with the brand new RC45 motorbike. Since those early days the Castrol Honda team has never finished outside the top three in the series and achieved the ultimate in 1997 when American John Kocinski clinched the world title. Castrol Honda has now become the most respected team in the paddock. During four seasons in the championship the team has earned 2,382 points, including a sensational 1997 when Castrol Honda took the riders, manufacturers and coveted teams titles. No one at Honda is resting on that success. The battle for World Superbike success continues as Castrol Honda and the committed group of technical sponsors go in search of perfection.

Officially licensed and developed with the 1997 World Champions, Castrol Honda Superbike is a blistering motorcycle racing simulation. Every aspect of the 1997 World Championship winning bike: the awesome 190 MPH 160 BHP Honda RVF-RC45 is simulated. To win the championship you will have to master the [illegible] on every track. Multiple [illegible] allow complete control [illegible] from the level of your [illegible] to tyre wear and whether or not [illegible] will put you out of the race.

FEATURES
- AARON SLIGHT AND COLIN EDWARDS
- Developed in association with Castrol Honda World Superbike Team Race Engineers and Riders.
- Race on high speed G.P. Circuits, twisting Street Circuits and Honda's own Test Track in Japan
- Multiple game mode including World Championship Simulation, Practice Mode and Trainer Mode
- Customisable difficulty levels from Novice to Ace
- Split screen and Network play for Head to Head action
- Full control of Bike setup using real data supplied by Honda Race Engineers
- Enhanced for all Graphic Accelerators including High Res True Colour Mode
- 100% Realistic wheelies, endos, jumps,skids and crashes
- Multiple game views including on and off Bike
- Full race replay emulates Real TV camera angles
- World tracks feature 190mph Bends, Chicanes, Hump Back Bridges, Kerbs, Tunnels and Pittanes
- Total control of game realism and Bike damage options

Johnny Herbert's Grand Prix Championship 1998

It's not just a game — it's reality

Welcome to the adrenaline filled world of Formula One Grand Prix Racing where quick wits and an even quicker car are all you need to finish first. Developed in association with F1 driver Johnny Herbert, Johnny Herbert's Grand Prix Championship 1998 is a breakneck ride into the greatest motor sport in the world. With stunning 3D graphics, accurate car simulations and superb sound, the experience of a lifetime awaits as you strap yourself in and race to the flag over 15 highly exciting tracks in 15 different countries!

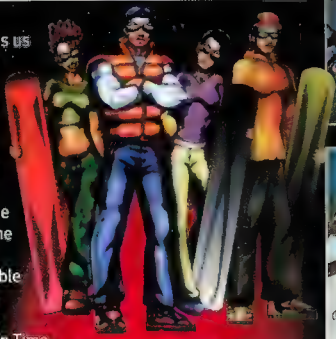
You can strive for the highest accolades in the World Championship, race against friends in Multiplayer mode, or hone your skills to perfection in Single Race or Training modes.

With 12 teams and 24 drivers you can pit your skills against the best or input and edit your own driver and team names. Everything from damage to realism is at your control and a Workshop facility lets you act as your own pit crew to ensure anything from tyre types to gear ratios is just how you like them. Get ready for the race of your life.

FEATURES
- Multiple game views/ TV Emulation race replays
- Help mode: Racing Line Display , On Screen Help and Autobraking
- Crashes & realistic car and engine damage
- Splitscreen option for head to head action and network play for up to 6 players
- Accelerator card enhanced - including high resolution and true colour mode
- Customisable difficulty levels, from rookie to ace
- User configurable joystick, keyboard, mouse and steering wheel
- Force Feedback facilities included

Snow Wave: Avalanche

The cutting edge in sports arcade games



Snow Wave: Avalanche introduces us to one of the most spectacular and enjoyable winter sports ever: SNOWBOARDING! Endorsed by snowboarding superstar Circe Wallace, Snow Wave: Avalanche brings you all the powder thrills (and spills) of this hugely popular sport. With Snow Wave: Avalanche you will be able to enjoy giddy descents among the frozen crags and canyons, perform terrifying jumps into space and incredible acrobatics worthy of a real champion. Compete against your phantom in the Ghost Chase Mode, against the clock in Time Attack, or against the four surfers in Surfer Rules. Descend by any of the six snow-covered slopes!! Show off your speed and your reflexes in the descent mode of Boardercross, performing precise turns around the slalom flags. Amaze the judges in the Big Jump Mode with your stratospheric acrobatics in the 'multislope stadium', or in the Big Jump Races with over 20 jump ramps, show all your acrobatic tricks.
Then, when you believe that you now dominate all the secrets of this sport you can try your luck with the Xtreme Tour. The ultimate championship in which the high speed of Boardercross meets the jump skill of Big Jump. Show everybody that you're the most complete and brilliant snowboarder of all times!!
Spectacular playability is guaranteed with Snow Wave Avalanche – the cutting edge in sports arcade games.

FEATURES

The Ultimate Snow Board experience. Stunning 3D Graphics and Superb Sound. Incredible sensation of speed with excellent controllability.

- **6 Highly Exciting Tracks**
- **Descent Mode : Show off speed and reflexes performing precise turns around the slalom flags**
- **Big Jump Mode: Amaze judges with stratospheric acrobatics in the multi-slope stadium**
- **Big Jump Races: More than 20 jump ramps for showing off all your tricks**
- **'Xtreme Tour' the definitive Championship – compete on all the different tracks.**

Four different options:

- **Ghost Chase: Compete against your phantom**
- **Time Attack: Race against the clock**
- **Surfer Rules: Compete against 4 different surfers**
- **Multiplayer and network play options available**
- **Keyboard, Joystick and Joystick controllers supported. Force Feedback joystick support available**

Midas budget range

PC CD-ROMS at £2.99

Incredibly, the actual cost of manufactured CD-ROMs has now fallen to the point where the potential sales volume justifies the launch of this ground-breaking product range. Never before has a range of PC CD-ROMs been available at such an amazingly low price. Midas believes that the PC games market is now sufficiently mature to make this budget range commercially viable and has for the past six months been scouring the planet for suitable games to include in this range.

There are already several ranges of cheap PC shareware products, yet despite some notable exceptions shareware is not anywhere close to the quality of commercially released games. Midas has put together a starting range of 30 games which will be launched at the Milla trade exhibition in Cannes in February. This means that the products should be in-store by March '99 at the latest.

Just to give you a flavour of the exceptionally high quality of these games, how would you like to get your hands on a three-track version of the the superb Castrol Honda Superbikes for just £2.99? Or take to the powder and snowboard with a new game from Hammer technologies — creators of SnowWave Avalanche? Together with other super-sexy, one-off original games, Midas plans to launch the range with a bang. As well as this, Midas already has plans to open subsidiaries in both Australia and the US, and partners from both territories are lining up their products to add to this range.

Midas £9.99 range

How can new games this good be available at such a low price?

Well, think about what is happening in the [illegible] place right now. Publishers are commit[illegible] greater resources to an ever diminishing [illegible] of products. In commercial terms, it's one hell of a lot safer to invest your money in the next Tomb Raider sequel than it is to invest in some new and speculative venture. Major corporations are money-making machines and can sometimes lose a grip on the nature of the creative enterprise in which they are engaged. With this attitude, you just know that you are going to get to see more clones of successful products than you dare to imagine.

So how does all this make sense of a PC product range at £9.99?

The creators of original products are most often independent development companies that have a dream. Okay, they may want commercial success, but the product comes first — developers live or die by the quality of the product that they create and as the independents are gobbled up by the large publishers there is a big vacuum between [illegible] wanting to get involved in the games industry and [illegible] that are working on commercial products. But what happens if a developer has a product but the publisher prefers to play safe with yet another sequel rather than speculate on an original product? Chances are that the developer's game will never see the light of day.

Not any more!! Welcome to the the Midas £9.99 mid-price range. Quality PC games that give developers an opportunity for global distribution of their commercial product. Hammer technologies, the Spanish development team, are so excited by the idea that they have already committed six original products to release at this price in 1999. And their example is being followed by a large team in Hungary who are also working to include products at this price. All in all, this range is looking extremely exciting and as soon as sales and marketing offices are opened in Cambridge, more information will be provided as to the details of this range.

MIDAS

THE MILLENNIUM: MIDAS INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT — AHEAD OF ITS TIME

If you would like to learn more about Midas, then visit our Web site at www.gamesarena.com

KILLER RIGS

TWO RECIPES FOR THE ULTIMATE GAMING MACHINE

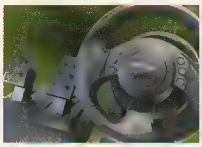
It's quite simple really. If you said 'here's a blank cheque, put yourself together a top-of-the-range gaming system', then this is what we'd go out and buy.

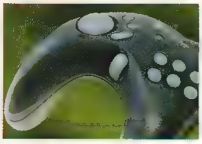
The 'no holds barred' system demonstrates some common sense. You won't see an extra £300 spent on a component that, although nice to have, would make no difference to the system's overall games performance.

The second, 'lean 'n' mean' configuration follows the same pattern, only now your blank cheque has a caveat: make it a quality gaming system to be proud of, but keep it cheap.

What could be simpler? We'll be updating the list every month as dictated by new arrivals, and we hope it proves useful to you in the ongoing battle to keep up with the latest technology in games.

NO HOLDS BARRED



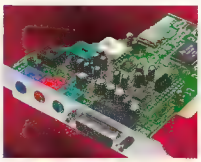


Intel walks straight into the top processor slot, but good to see that 3Dfx Voodoo 2 technology still walks away with it for 3D muscle

Component	Product	Price	Web
Motherboard	ASUS P2B (440BX)	£108	www.asus.com
CPU	Pentium II 450	£429	www.intel.com
Memory	256Mb PC100 RAM	£250	www.insight.com
Disk controller	Built-in UDMA 33	NA	NA
Primary graphics	Matrox Mystique G200 16Mb	£120	www.matrox.com
Secondary graphics	Quantum3D ObsidianX24(V2 SLI)	£309	www.quantum3d.com
Floppy drive	Teac 3.5" 1.44Mb	£23	www.teac.com
Hard drive	14.4Gb IBM Titan UDMA	£288	www.uk.ibm.com
CD/DVD ROM	Plextor Ultraplex 40Max internal	£129	www.plextor.be
Backup	Iomega Zip (100Mb internal)	£81	www.iomega.co.uk
Monitor	Nokia 445XPro (21" FST)	£850	www.nokia.com
Audio	Sound Blaster Live!	£128	www.soundblaster.com
Speakers	VideoLogic Sirocco	£199	www.videologic.co.uk
Modem	Pace 56k V90 Voice internal	£98	www.pace.co.uk
Case	ATX Tower	£93	www.insight.com
PSU	Built-in 250W	NA	NA
Keyboard	Keytronic KT2000	£21	www.insight.com
Mouse	MS-IntelliMouse USB	£30	www.microsoft.com
Action game controller	MS-SideWinder Gamepad	£29	www.microsoft.com
Flight joystick	Thrustmaster F22 Pro	£150	www.thrustmaster.co.uk
Throttle	Thrustmaster TQS	£129	www.thrustmaster.co.uk
Rudder/Pedals	Thrustmaster Elite Rudder	£60	www.thrustmaster.co.uk
Driving controls	MS-SideWinder Force Feedback	£160	www.microsoft.com
		TOTAL	**£3,684**

LEAN 'N' MEAN

There are two areas of debate here. One is the AMD K6-2 versus the Intel Celeron A. The former for price, the latter for its Slot 1 motherboard path. The second is the choice between a 3Dfx Banshee-based 3D card or the more powerful nVidia TNT. We have opted for the former on the grounds of price and Glide support



Component	Product	Price	Web
Motherboard	TMC TI5VG +	£76	www.microsoft.com
CPU	AMD K6-2 350	£105	www.intel.com
Memory	128Mb PC100 RAM	£125	www.insight.com
Disk controller	Built-in UDMA/33	NA	NA
Primary graphics	Maxi Gamer Phoenix (Banshee)	£99	www.guillemot.com/uk
Secondary graphics		NA	NA
Floppy drive	Mitsumi 3.5" 1.44Mb	£18	www.mitsumi.com
Hard drive	8.4Gb IBM UDMA	£148	www.uk.ibm.com
CD/DVD-ROM	Maxi DVD-ROM	£99	www.guillemot.com/uk
Back-up	Iomega Zip (100Mb internal)	£81	www.iomega.co.uk
Monitor	Nokia 447Xpro (17")	£410	www.nokia.com
Audio	Diamond Sonic Impact S90	£40	www.diamondmm.co.uk
Speakers	Labtec 2612	£71	www.labtec.com
Modem	Pace 56k V90 Voice internal	£77	www.pace.co.uk
Case	ATX midi tower	£60	www.insight.com
PSU	Built-in 235W	NA	NA
Keyboard	Generic PS/2 Win95	£13	www.insight.com
Mouse	MS-basic mouse	£18	www.microsoft.com
Action game controller	MS-SideWinder Gamepad	£29	www.microsoft.com
Flight controller	MS-Sidewinder Precision Pro	£40	www.microsoft.com
		TOTAL	**£1,509**

We have made every effort to ensure that the prices quoted here are correct at the time of going to press and that only finished retail products are included. Please bear in mind there is a lead time involved between writing and distribution of PCGW, and that the prices quoted are recommended retail from the manufacturer or direct from reputable mail order sites. Do shop around.

MULTIMEDIA

STAR WARS: BEHIND THE MAGIC

Sad, sensationalising journalists often tend to overuse and misconstrue the word ultimate. Here is one instance where it is completely justified. **STAR WARS: BEHIND THE MAGIC** (*LucasArts, £24.99*) really is the ultimate guide to the classic Star Wars universe.

In spring all eyes will be turned to the *Star Wars* prequel starring Ewan McGregor and Liam Neeson instead of Alec Guinness and Mark Hamill. But if you want an all-encompassing, entertaining one-stop shop guide to everything from the first three scripts to the characters and weapons, to the related books, comics and toys, then you need look no further.

It's simply and logically laid out and contains hundreds of still images, videos and audio interviews. The scene-by-scene breakdown of the three existing films is impressive in its detail and contains plenty of secondary data, background material and trivia, alongside the raison d'etre for each scene and the official script. Useful for the obsessed, or indeed anyone who would like to see how a film is put together.

Within the technology section there is a 3D walkthrough of the Millennium Falcon, and a Weapons Test where you get to see the results of five weapons, from an Ewok rock to a Death Star Ray on an Imperial Stormtrooper.

There are minor omissions – the large blasters represented by modified Lewis guns in episode IV are not mentioned in the technology section, for instance – but this is a minor grouch. As far as film multimedia experiences go, this ranks alongside the James Bond Interactive CD-ROM as top of the class.

★★★★ *AD*

CARS OF THE WORLD

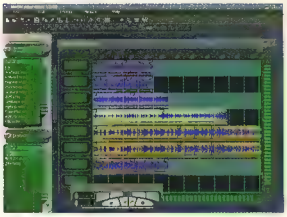
Cars, cars, cars and more cars – narrated by Lord Montague of Beaulieu, this 'motor-paedia' will tell you all about them. How much, how big, how fast, and their progenitors. Each section in **CARS OF THE WORLD** (*Focus Interactive, £9.99*) offers a range of rather blocky video clips but is strangely lacking in sound. After all, at least half the appeal of a gorgeous 1993 Lamborghini Diablo is the fact that it sounds like a barely-controlled monster! That aside, there is a rather funky multimedia presentation utility that allows you to mix narration, video, text and stills. Enter the contents section and decide to follow the development of the car or jump straight into the rally and racing car section, or country specific selections. There will be something in here for both the junior 'rev head' and the mature aficionado.

★★★ *NM*

PLANES OF THE WORLD

With a title like **PLANES OF THE WORLD** (*Focus Interactive, £9.99*) you'd be right to assume that this is all about planes, but here we're dealing strictly with the commercial – rather than military variety. From the same stable as Cars Of The World, the structure, edit suite and navigation are similar. The narration is by a chap called Captain Robert Haylar, who introduces the neat commercial aircraft sub-categories, short range, turbo and piston prop, and many more. There are literally hundreds of stills, videos and sound clips – everything from shots of loading doors to videos of the landing sequence from the cockpit. This reminds me of that card game, Top Trumps. The player had to pick a category and the fastest, lightest or the one with the greatest range would win. Things have moved on.

★★★ *NM*

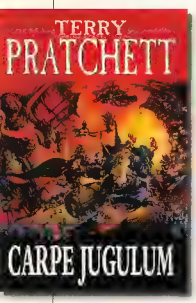


MAGIX MUSIC MAKER V2000

The latest version in the Music Maker series, **MAGIX MUSIC MAKER V2000** (*Magix, £39.99*), is an easy-to-use WAV-based sample arranger with a straightforward interface and plenty of pleasing features. Overall performance depends on your system, but V2000 boasts up to 32 tracks of CD quality audio and includes powerful editing features like Time Stretch, Resampling and Pitch Shift. There's also DirectX support for DirectSound, which should allow for plenty of additional third-party plug-ins. However, to get to grips with the intricacies of sample-based music, you'll also need a third-party sample editor. Nevertheless with a good selection of onboard samples and ongoing support from the extensive Magix library, you've got a more than useful entry-level tool for producing Windows-based music.

★★★ *JH*

CHRISTMAS BOOKS



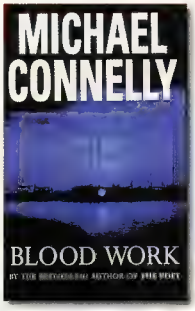
As the old children's poem has it, 'Christmas is coming, the goose is getting fat, please put *£16.99* in Terry Pratchett's hat…' With a new hardback and the paperback of the last but one book in the shops by November every year, Terry Pratchett has become as indispensable as Bob Cratchett in the festive season (Tiny Tim's dad. You know, the kid who dies in *A Christmas Carol*. Christmas Carol. It's a book, by Dickens… Well, that's the last time I try to inject some culture into these pages.)

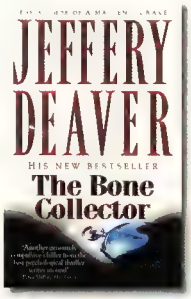
Pratchett can be variable, particularly when he's trying to be meaningful. But the latest, **CARPE JUGULUM**, is our Terry on top form, as a family of vampires try to take over the Kingdom of Lancre, home of Granny Weatherwax, Nanny Ogg and assorted other witches. Pratchett devotees will love it, and it's probably a good one for anyone who's never read any Discworld books before. In fact, it ranks up there with *Witches Abroad* as almost the funniest in the series, though it's got a way to go before it beats *Guards, Guards!* as far as I'm concerned.

Also very funny is **DIVORCING JACK** by Colin Bateman *(Harper Collins, £5.99)* – if you like black comedy set among the burnt out cars and undercurrents of sectarian violence that is still Ulster. Hero Dan Starkey has no idea why someone has murdered his lover and kidnapped his wife: but if he's to save his marriage, he'll have to find out. If it sounds familiar, that'll be because it's about to hit the big screen, with one of Britain's most talented actors, David Thewlis, as Dan.

And if you want to keep up the chuckles this Christmas, then I can highly recommend The **TASMANIAN BABE FIASCO** by John Birmingham *(Flamingo/Harper Collins, £6.99)*. A celebration of Aussie slacker life, it's an hilarious paranoid romp through the subculture of the 'permanent student' and the 'unemployable', as the hero and his friends try to defeat evil property developers and avoid murderous lesbian biker chicks.

Less funny – in fact, not funny at all – is **BLOOD WORK**, Michael Connelly's latest thriller *(Orion, £5.99)*. Former FBI profiler Terry McCaleb is recovering from a heart transplant when a beautiful woman tells him his new heart came from her sister, who was brutally gunned down in what the cops think was nothing more than a convenience store robbery that went wrong. McCaleb, reluctantly, gets involved – but what he thought would be nothing more than a swift review of the police investigation to reassure a grieving sister becomes something monstrous, as he uncovers the true motive behind a bloody killing spree…



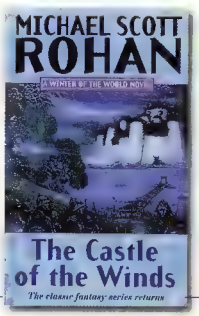


Connelly is one of the best thriller writers around at the moment, and unlike most of his rivals seems to care about his characters. That means that even when the plot becomes pretty far-fetched, you'll forgive him because you want to find out what happens.

Despite blood work being the phrase coined by the FBI for detailed analysis of blood and tissue remains, Connelly never goes over the top in his descriptions – unlike some other crime thriller writers who attempt to outdo Patricia Cornwell's graphic descriptions of decayed human remains. Jeffrey Deaver is a case in point. His **THE BONE COLLECTOR** *(Coronet, £5.99)* is just too carefully structured, and the surprise ending too stage managed, to really engage the reader's interest. Having said that, it's still a pretty good read.

Michael Scott Rohan burst on to the British fantasy scene more than a decade ago with his *Winter of the World* series, then threw it all away with three clunkers about a modern-day businessman with the ability to step into an alternate, magical world of flying galleons and pirates. His latest though, **THE CASTLE OF THE WINDS** *(Orbit, £6.99)* marks a return to form and a return to the *Winter of the World* setting, where magic-working mastersmiths fight the evil spirits of the encroaching glacial ice.

Finally, Hugo and Nebula award-winning science fiction author Greg Bear has written a sequel to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Lost World*, in which the operator of the last dinosaur circus has decided to take his performers home to the mysterious South American plateau where they were captured. Set just after the WWII, **DINOSAUR SUMMER** is magical and a, remarkably, fitting follow-up to Conan Doyle's book. *MC*



Half-Life multiplay may need some fixing, but it's still a blast

Dammit, Half-Life is annoying! Clearly there's much fun to be had in multiplayer, but there's so much for Valve to fix as well. The networking is pretty darn broken, being a slow and badly animated experience at best – even on a LAN. However, if we grit our teeth, it's an absolute blast to play!

The coolest thing has to be deeply wonderful 'decal' system. In Quake II you have skins, which are all well and good, but if other players don't have the skin, they see only the basic Grunt. Few servers carry skins and most players have 'allow download' turned off anyway. Half-Life returns to the QuakeWorld style 'colours' but the decal is another thing altogether. Draw a nice greyscale 64 x 64 pixel picture, slap it in the logos dir, then join a game. Your client will upload the decal to the server and the server will send it to the other clients automatically. Now you can spray your personal graffiti for everyone to see!

Of course, this lags the game out yet further because of the hefty problems with multiplayer bandwidth, but I'm confident Valve will fix it all. After all, it has to – the Team Fortress 2 add-on is coming. You might notice we're not going to rat on Valve too much for the multiplayer problems. Our excuse is that the game sits solidly on the single-player experience, unlike Quake II. Actually it's because Gordon has a goatee and thus can do no wrong in my book. :)

Shortly we can look forward to new Half-Life maps, mods, multiplayer improvements and mastering of the more problematic weapons such as the Gauss Gun. That said, I don't think the game lends itself to the same sort of competitive play like Quake II, especially given the lack of team play. It's just a casual blast but that's all right by me!

http://www.contaminated.net
My favourite Half-Life site
http://www.planethalflife.com/repository/
How to make decals

Mat 'The Lurker' Bettinson
Comments or questions about online gaming? Write to Mat or email him on mat@mats.net

FANTASY WAR

Sony goes into battle online

◆ Sony. Due Winter 98. www.station.sony.com/fantasywar

Subjects of the Kingdom of Rontovar specialise in magic and engineering

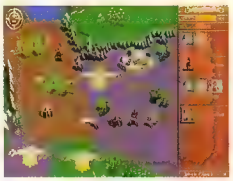
While this new high-profile online game is turn-based, Fantasy War isn't simply a rehash of Warlords III or Heroes Of Might & Magic II. It's a charming online-only design crammed full of idiosyncrasies, where you can even render one your opponent's leaders 'indisposed' for the turn, leaving you to free to move an occupying army into one of his minor allies' territories…

Play involves up to seven would-be conquerors issuing orders for troop movements, spell-casting, recruiting heroes, and the like. Once all orders are received, the game's server at Sony processes them simultaneously, assigning the next initiative randomly to keep things hopping. that way it avoids the usual turn-based tedium of having to wait for several minutes for someone else to move.

The simple mechanics encourage fast play. There is even a planned blitz game, where the time limit would be three minutes or so per turn: You'll have to prioritise your moves, because once there are a lot of forces on the map, you just wouldn't have time to do everything. For anyone who likes to ponder over all the strategic alternatives, however, there is an epic game, which resembles a play-by-email game.

Combat is brisk, comprising three rounds: ranged attack, any attempts to flank the opponent, and finally melee. Morale plays a big part, and armies may break and run before losing all of their troops – a nice change from the 'fight to the last Orc' so prevalent in many recent strategy games. Economics plays a big part as well, but it doesn't seem particularly complicated during play. Even in this early stage, this is looking like one of the most promising online games we've seen in a while.

Terry Coleman



Armies move between provinces

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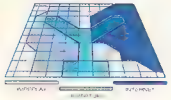

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HALF-LIFE ONLINE

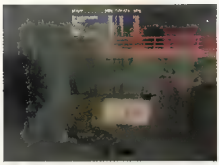
Quake II finally has a serious challenger in the online gaming stakes. As we reveal, the tactical, less-action-oriented Half-Life has much to offer the thoughtful fragger

Getting up and running is as simple as hitting the Multiplayer Customise item in Half-Life's menu. Next you'll want to go to 'Setup' to configure your character before joining a server.

There are several models to choose from – the standard Gordon model, female HEV suit, soldier, scientist and biohazard mask HEV suit. Each model has two coloured sections, one of which is the main body colour. Sliders on the bottom right allow you to select which colours each section should be in. While there are no skins as such, the combination of models and colours is enough to differentiate characters so long as you make an effort to choose something original. No standard-coloured 'Gordons' please!

Next there's your decal. Now you can be boring and choose one of the presets included with Half-Life, but it's far better to create your own distinctive one (see box opposite). The choice of colours is limited and they dictate the kind of surfaces the decal is best seen on. The important thing to note about the decals – and why everyone should make their own – is that your copy of Half-Life will upload your decal to the server as you connect. The server will then send a copy of it to everyone else in the level, in the middle of the game even. Impressive? You bet!

Get bombed! A laser trip bomb across a ladder and a satchel charge will do more than singe some eyebrows



Frag totals include your deaths

Following extensive play on both a LAN and the Internet, we've noticed a number of strengths and weaknesses to multiplayer Half-Life.

Strengths include solid weapons – every one is effective and unique. Laser trip bomb and remote explosive traps provide a fresh perspective on setting ambushes, and contribute to the sneakier, more strategic playing style compared with Quake II.

Both the speed of action and physics are realistic, the weapons selection system is excellent, and the 3D sound and environmental audio is rich and immersive. And of course, there's the player graffiti!

Less successfully, Internet performance is laggy, and the animations are jerky and repetitive. During play it's possible to get stuck on lifts and the like. There are no sounds when players are being shot or dying, and lastly there are long delays as the server changes map between deathmatches.

Half-Life isn't immediately going to take over from Quake II as it doesn't lend itself to the same heavy-duty competition-style gameplay, especially as there are no team-play modes as yet. However it's proving popular as a casual and entertaining online blast, not the least because it has a built-in system for finding fast servers, of which the fastest in the UK are the Barrysworld servers. With upcoming update releases, multiplayer Half-Life can only get better. So stay tuned for a report on Team Fortress 2 which will be released as a commercial add-on for Half-Life in the new year.

GAME TIPS

● The Power Assist is often the only way of getting into hard-to-reach locations. Half-Life's

Dr Lurkenstein, forsaking his trusty rail gun, goes sniping with the crossbow

training course shows how to use this item, which is also very handy for outrunning your opponents!

- There's no rocket jumping in Half-Life, but there is an equivalent: the Gauss Jump. Simply charge up your Gauss Gun with the alternate fire key, run forwards, look quickly down, jump and then fire. You'll be catapulted into the air and you won't take any damage unless you fall too far. The Gauss Jump is controllable – the longer you build up the charge, the higher you'll jump – but don't leave it too late. You can use this technique to get to places ordinarily requiring the Power Assist.
- Try to place trip bombs at heights other than the standard, which can be ducked under. Two trip bombs placed at crouch level and then normal height will mean someone has to shoot the tripbombs to get past – which is none too easy in a busy game!
- Reload as soon as you pick up the MP5 machine gun! Reload all of the time when you're not actively firing at people, then you won't run out of ammo when you need it most.
- Don't forget grenades, they're very powerful in Half-Life and are superb for clearing out camping spots.
- Sniping is very effective with the crossbow. Find a place to hide, then use the alternate fire to zoom in. Aim at something attractive to players (a weapon perhaps?) and take them out as they arrive.
- Fire Snarks at vulnerable people. Many weapons can easily dispose of snarks. However a rocket jockey is extremely vulnerable to these critters – if you see one, fire off a volley and then leg it so they don't come after you too!

DECALS AHOY!

Making a decal is easy. Paintshop Pro is easily capable of doing it – you'll find a demo version of this share-ware paint package on this month's CDs. A decal is just a 64 x 64-pixel greyscale picture saved out as a 256-colour BMP. Black is transparent, white is full on paint. While the image must be grey, the colour of the decal 'paint' is chosen in Half-Life's Multiplayer Customisation menu.

It's probably better to actually work on a large version of your picture, say 200 x 200 pixels, and in 24-bit. Then use Paintshop's resize option to take it down to 64 x 64 pixels and then reduce the colour depth to 256 colour greyscale.

One thing to bear in mind is that you can't guarantee which way round your decal will be sprayed onto a wall. So on some surfaces text might appear fine, on others it will be unreadable as a mirror image. You can either learn which surfaces can be sprayed using your chosen orientation or use no writing at all. I opted for the name 'Lurkenstein' written twice, one of which is the mirror of the other.

When your image is done, save your 64 x 64 256-colour greyscale BMP into the logos drawer in your Half-Life installation. Select your image from the multiplayer customisation menu and away you go! Oh, if you do update the file, it won't update in the game as you see it because of a cache. The easiest solution is to change the filename, delete the old one and select it afresh

WORKAROUNDS

If you get stuck at the top of the lift, duck at the top. Do NOT duck as the lift hits the top or you will be stuck and need to type 'kill' in the console.

If you Alt-Tab to Windows by mistake and discover no sound when returning to Half-Life, press Escape to return to the Half-Life menu, then Escape again to go back to the game – sound should be restored.

The rate and pushlatency values are wrong for Internet play. If you find you have a ping of 200, go to the console and type 'pushlatency -200'. The default of -500 doesn't help! You might like to increase your rate to about 5000 if using ISDN or a faster network connection – just type 'rate 5000' in the console.

Mat Bettinson

Guise and dolls: The five player models are customised by colour alone

GREATEST HITS OF ALL TIME

This might be considered something rather special. Fair takes yer breath away, in fact. The PC Gaming World readers' greatest games of all time. Updated monthly – based cumulatively on your votes (for which we say 'ta, very much'). If you'd like to vote please follow the instructions in the coupon at the foot of the page. This month: Quake II breaks the Top 10, and Tomb Raider II breaks the Top 20. Unreal is the biggest climber – up an amazing 49 places to No 48. Total Annihilation falls our of the Top 20, down to 21. Anticipation for Settlers III lifts Settlers II 19 places to 53. And X-Wing Vs TIE Fighter and Ultima VII are the two new entries

NE – New Entry RE – Re Entry

Position		Title	Label	Game Type
1	(1)	Command & Conquer: Red Alert	Westwood	Strat/War
2	(2)	Command & Conquer	Westwood	Strat/War
3	(3)	Duke Nukem 3D	GT	Action
4	(5)	Quake	GT	Action
5	(5)	Tomb Raider	Eidos	Action
6	(6)	Doom	GT	Action
7	(7)	Civilization II	MicroProse	Strat/War
8	(11)	Quake II	Activision	Action
9	(8)	Doom II	GT	Action
10	(9)	SimCity 2000	Maxis	Strat/War
11	(12)	Diablo	Blizzard	Adv/RPG
12	(10)	Worms	Team 17	Action
13	(13)	Warcraft II	Blizzard	Strat/War
14	(15)	Age Of Empires	Microsoft	Strat/War
15	(14)	Formula 1 Grand Prix 2	MicroProse	Action
16	(17)	Theme Hospital	Bullfrog	Strat/War
17	(16)	TIE Fighter	LucasArts	Simulation
18	(18)	Grand Theft Auto	Take 2	Action
19	(24)	Tomb Raider II	Eidos	Action
20	(21)	X-COM: UFO – Enemy Unknown	MicroProse	Strat/War
21	(19)	Total Annihilation	GT	Strat/War
22	(20)	Championship Manager 2	Eidos	Sports
23	(22)	Dungeon Keeper	Bullfrog	Strat/War
24	(23)	X-COM: Terror From The Deep	MicroProse	Strat/War
25	(28)	Transport Tycoon	MicroProse	Strat/War
26	(31)	Championship Manager 2: 97/98	Eidos	Sports
27	(25)	FIFA '97	EA Sports	Sports
28	(30)	Carmageddon	SCI	Action
29	(28)	Theme Park	Bullfrog	Strat/War
30	(29)	Secret of Monkey Island 2	LucasArts	Adv/RPG
31	(32)	MechWarrior II	Activision	Action
32	(33)	Civilization	MicroProse	Strat/War
33	(34)	Secret Of Monkey Island	LucasArts	Adv/RPG
34	(36)	Broken Sword	Virgin	Adv/RPG
35	(35)	Heroes Of Might & Magic II	3DO	Adv/RPG
36	(40)	Network Q RAC Rally	Europress	Simulation
37	(37)	Sam & Max Hit The Road	LucasArts	Adv/RPG
38	(41)	Worms 2	Team 17	Strat/War
39	(42)	MDK	Interplay	Action
40	(39)	X-Wing	LucasArts	Simulation
41	(38)	Screamer	Virgin	Action
42	(47)	X-COM: Apocalypse	MicroProse	Strat/War
43	(44)	Railroad Tycoon	MicroProse	Strat/War
44	(46)	Sensible World Of Soccer	GT	Sports
45	(48)	EF 2000	Ocean	Simulation
46	(43)	Myst	Red Orb	Adv/RPG
47	(45)	Dune II - Battle For Arrakis	Westwood	Strat/War
48	(97)	Unreal	GT	Action
49	(49)	Screamer 2	Virgin	Action
50	(56)	Blade Runner	Westwood	Adv/RPG

Position		Title	Label	Game Type
51	(50)	Ultima Underworld	Origin	Adv/RPG
52	(57)	FIFA Road To World Cup 98	EA Sports	Sports
53	(72)	Settlers II: Veni, Vidi, Vici	Blue Byte	Strat/War
54	(51)	SimCity	Maxis	Strat/War
55	(52)	FIFA '96	EA Sports	Sports
56	(53)	Panzer General	Mindscape	Strat/War
57	(54)	Colonization	MicroProse	Strat/War
58	(63)	Curse Of Monkey Island	LucasArts	Adv/RPG
59	(59)	Discworld II	Psygnosis	Adv/RPG
60	(55)	Dark Forces	LucasArts	Action
61	(58)	Master Of Orion	MicroProse	Strat/War
62	(60)	Day Of The Tentacle	LucasArts	Adv/RPG
63	(61)	Syndicate Wars	Bullfrog	Strat/War
64	(62)	Eternal Dagger	Mindscape	Adv/RPG
65	(66)	Warcraft	Blizzard	Strat/War
66	(64)	Wing Commander IV	Origin	Simulation
67	(70)	Dark Forces 2: Jedi Knight	LucasArts	Action
68	(65)	Master Of Orion II	MicroProse	Strat/War
69	(67)	The Dig	Dreamworks	Adv/RPG
70	(68)	Ultima Underworld 2	Origin	Adv/RPG
71	(69)	IndyCar Racing	Sierra Studios	Simulation
72	(77)	Indiana Jones & The Fate Of Atlantis	LucasArts	Adv/RPG
73	(79)	Steel Panthers	Mindscape	Start/War
74	(94)	Little Big Adventure	Electronic Arts	Adv/RPG
75	(71)	Monopoly	Hasbro	Clas/Puzz
76	(73)	PGA European Golf	EA Sports	Sports
77	(74)	Worms United	Team 17	Strat/War
78	(89)	C&C Red Alert: The Aftermath	Westwood	Strat/War
79	(75)	Syndicate	Bullfrog	Action
80	(76)	Age Of Rifles	Mindscape	Strat/War
81	(78)	Elite	Game Tek	Simulation
82	(80)	Frontier: Elite 2	Game Tek	Simulation
83	(81)	Harpoon	Mindscape	Strat/War
84	(82)	Wing Commander III	Origin	Simulation
85	(83)	Realms Of The Haunting	Gremlin	Adv/RPG
86	(84)	Premier Manager '97	Gremlin	Sports
87	(85)	Pirates	MicroProse	Strat/War
88	(86)	7th Guest	Virgin	Adv/RPG
89	(87)	StarCraft	Blizzard	Strat
90	(88)	Little Big Adventure 2	Electronic Arts	Adv/RPG
91	(90)	Battle Isle 2	Blue Byte	Strat/War
92	(91)	Ultima VIII	Origin	Adv/RPG
93	(92)	War in Russia	Mindscape	Strat/War
94	NE	X-Wing Vs TIE Fighter	LucasArts	Simulation
95	(93)	Comanche 3.0	NovaLogic	Simulation
96	(95)	System Shock	Electronic Arts	Adv/RPG
97	(96)	Eye Of The Beholder	Mindscape	Adv/RPG
98	NE	Ultima VII	Origin	Adv/RPG
99	(98)	Constructor	Acclaim	Strat/War
100	(99)	Prince of Persia	Broderbund	Action

VOTE!

Don't miss your chance to vote. Help select the greatest games ever in our readers' poll

So do you agree with the results of our Readers' Chart? If not you can change them for next month. All you have to do is VOTE!

What games are you playing at the moment? What are your favourite games of all time? Please return the coupon with your choices and ratings so that other gamers and game publishers can benefit from your experience.

Please fill out the questionnaire below giving us your opinion. We will be printing the coupon every month.

And as a shameless incentive to register your votes, three lucky winners selected from the entries will win their choice of one current chart game*

LAST ISSUE'S PRIZE WINNERS:
Richard Sloman, Rochford; Jim Starling, Bournemouth; and Sarah Mann, Abertillery

What are your five favourite PC games of all time (title/publisher)?

1 _____ /
2 _____ /
3 _____ /
4 _____ /
5 _____ /

What are the three games you've played most recently (title/publisher)?

1 _____ /
2 _____ /
3 _____ /

Please complete the following to enter the prize draw

Your name: _____

Your address: _____

Town: _____ Post code: _____

Daytime telephone no. _____

❑ We may want to conduct more research about games playing habits. If you would not be interested in taking part in more research please tick this box.

❑ Your personal information will be kept confidential, but from time to time we may want to pass your name and address on to other parties for them to send you information on you may be interested in. If you would prefer us not to please tick this box.

*Game draw rules: The Editor's decision is final. No correspondence will be entered into. No employees or affiliates of Ziff Davis UK may enter. No cash equivalent will be given. Maximum RRP of selected game £45

WHERE TO SEND YOUR FORM

It's really easy!

Complete the form from the magazine - if you don't want to damage it, photocopy it. You can send the form to us at: PC Gaming World Games Chart, Ziff Davis, International House, 1 St Katharine's Way E1 9UN or fax it to us on 0171 903 8776

ON THE CDS

What's on 'em, how to find it, and how to run it

WHAT'S ON CD A

FULLY PLAYABLE DEMOS
Descent III
Grand Touring
Trespasser: Lost World
Populous: The Beginning
Madden NFL 99
Rival Realms
Pro Pinball Big Race USA
Newman/Haas Racing
O. D. T.
Cybermercs
Top Gun: Hornet's Nest
Future Cop: LAPD 2100
NHL 99
X-Plane (requires 3Dfx card)
DethKarz
SCARS

MOVIE PREVIEW
Jeff Wayne's The War of the Worlds

PATCHES AND AD-ONS
Half-Life Server patch
Motorhead v2.0 patch
Unreal v2.19 patch
Unreal multiplayer level patch
PS2 Mouse rate accelerator patch

ONLINE GAMING SPECIAL
Battlefield Communicator software

FULLY PLAYABLE DEMOS

DESCENT III

Interplay

The third instalment of the Descent saga promises to be the best yet as the vertigo continues in a gravity defying, pulse-pounding combat experience. Not only will you discover the same frenzied, subterranean blasting action as Descents I and II, but also the thrill of flying out of the mines into the planetary atmosphere where you can engage enemy air and ground forces and use 10 new, lethal weapons to obliterate the most sophisticated robotic adversaries to date.

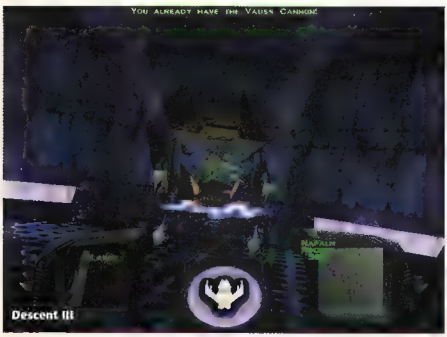
REQUIREMENTS:
P166, 32Mb RAM, Win95

TRESPASSER: LOST WORLD

DreamWorks Interactive

A digital sequel to the blockbuster motion picture The Lost World: Jurassic Park, DreamWorks Interactive's Trespasser blends elements of first-person action and adventure. You play Anne, a castaway who must find a means of survival after landing on Site B – the setting of The Lost World. The dinosaurs are claimed to have realistic behaviour patterns and you will need to use lateral thinking to overcome challenges in this non-linear adventure.

REQUIREMENTS:
P166, 32Mb RAM, SVGA with 1Mb, mouse, sound card, Win95



POPULOUS: THE BEGINNING

Bullfrog

The third game in the acclaimed Populous series takes a whole new approach to the god game genre. This playable demo includes three single-player levels, one multiplayer map, and a tutorial to get you up to speed.

REQUIREMENTS:
P133, 16Mb RAM, DirectX 6, Win95,

GRAND TOURING

Empire

Way back at the turn of the century, young men of substance took their cars on the grand tour, roving Europe in fast, sporty cars and terrifying the locals and native wildlife. Today the tradition lives on in Empire's Grand Touring, which gives you a chance to emulate those impetuous young bloods. Race modern classics in the demo in this fine-looking GT-style circuit racer.

REQUIREMENTS:
P166, 32Mb RAM, Win95

DETHKARZ

Infogrames

New demo featuring the excellent bonus Pole track from this futuristic racer.

REQUIREMENTS:
P166, 16Mb RAM, Direct X6, Win95

RIVAL REALMS

Digital Integration

Explore a vast fantasy realm in this real-time strategy bash from Romanian developer Active Pub. Play as Humans, Orcs or Elves in a fight to dominant the land.

DethKarz

AND MORE...

ONLINE GAMING SPECIAL

BATTLEFIELD COMMUNICATOR SOFTWARE

The Battlefield Communicator is an exciting new technology that allows player-to-player voice communication in multiplayer games like Quake II, Half-Life and others. In essence it's a software application that allows you to talk over a LAN or Internet while playing. On the CD we include both the client and server software, plus a full information pack. For the full story see feature on page 70 in this issue.

PATCHES AND ADD-ONS

- HALF LIFE SERVER PATCH
- MOTORHEAD 2.0 PATCH
- UNREAL 2.19 PATCH
- UNREAL MULTIPLAYER LEVEL PATCH
- PS2 MOUSE RATE ACCELERATOR PATCH

MOVIE PREVIEW

JEFF WAYNE'S THE WAR OF THE WORLDS

GT Interactive

Massive movie preview of Jeff Wayne's epic tale of Martian conflict. Based on the Jeff Wayne project and H G Wells' classic science fiction novel

Pro Pinball: Big Race USA

Rival Realms features an innovative roleplaying twist – each of your units can be improved with experience, gaining armour, strength and magic.

REQUIREMENTS:

P133, 16Mb RAM, Win95

PRO PINBALL: BIG RACE USA

Empire

Hugely playable pinball table from Empire. The spiritual successor to Empire's huge hit Pro Pinball: Timeshock, it has an impressive pedigree. Race from city to city bagging cash and credits as you go, dodge the cop cars, bump other motors out of the race and try to activate the multi-ball modes to head for the high score table.

REQUIREMENTS:

P166, 16Mb RAM, Win95

MADDEN NFL 99

EA Sports

For American Football fans Big John Madden's NFL series is the ultimate in Gridiron action. This year's version is the finest exponent to date, featuring authentic rosters, significant gameplay improvements and full 3D polygonal graphics, with support for D3D acceleration, if you have it. A *PC Gaming World* Classic.

REQUIREMENTS:

P166, 16Mb RAM, SVGA with 2Mb, mouse, sound board, DirectX 6, Win95

Madden NFL 99

NEWMAN/HAAS RACING

Psygnosis

Psygnosis has paired up with one of America's favourite racing families and three-time CART champions, the Newman/Haas Racing team, to bring you its latest racing title. This rather splendid cut-down demo version contains only a small sample of the full speedster delights in store.

REQUIREMENTS:

P133, 16Mb RAM, Win95

NHL 99

EA Sports

Experience the shoulder barging, frenetic slap-shot action of the world's premier Ice Hockey league in this *PC Gaming World* Classic game – NHL 99. Near-TV quality graphics, splendid gameplay and superb presentation make this very special. The demo provides a warm-up match between the Washington Capitals and Detroit Red Wings at the Detroit Arena.

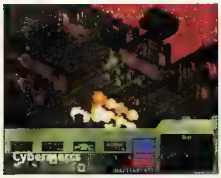
REQUIREMENTS:

P166, 16Mb RAM, SVGA with 1Mb, mouse, sound card, Win95

O. D. T.

Psygnosis

Explore the perils of the Forbidden Zone on the fabulous world of Tonantzin. On a mission to rescue the magical Green Pearl, your ship is forced to crash land next to a mysterious tower. Your captain appoints one member of the crew to find fuel for the craft and guess who volunteered? Can



you repair your ship and resume your quest… and what are those strange noises coming from the tower?

REQUIREMENTS:

Pentium processor, DirectX 5, Win95

CYBERMERCS

Digital Impact

The year is 2114 and Earth is suffering from a population crisis. Mankind has moved to the stars, but the new-found colony has been overrun by hostile native life-forms. You play an elite mercenary sent in to save the colony when conventional methods fail.

REQUIREMENTS:

P166, 32Mb RAM, DirectX, Win95

TOP GUN: HORNET'S NEST

MicroProse

Top Gun: Hornet's Nest is a crossover action/simulation that takes players back to the Navy training school to learn the nuances of the F/A-18 Hornet. The demo features action-oriented missions that cover attacks on both ground and air targets.

REQUIREMENTS:

P166, 32Mb RAM, DirectX 6, Win95/Win98

FUTURE COP: LAPD

Electronic Arts

In Future Cop: LAPD you control a high-tech transforming hovercraft in a futuristic landscape modelled on the mean streets of Los Angeles today. You're a specialist cop fighting against a crazed gang leader who's trying to take over the city.

REQUIREMENTS:

P133, 16Mb RAM, Win95

X-PLANE

Laminar Research

X-Plane is a realistic flight simulator that supports 3D terrain and elevation maps and includes a powerful physics modeller that can simulate various weather conditions and technologies Other features include oil rigs with helipads, full rendering of other air traffic for formation flying, and the ability to plot intersections on maps for IFR practice. This demo will function as a straight demo or an updater if you already have the X-Plane CD. In demo mode, joystick support will cease after five minutes.

REQUIREMENTS:

P133, 32Mb RAM, 3Dfx card with Open GL support, joystick, DirectX 5.0, Win95

SCARS

Ubi Soft

Unconventional animal racer.

REQUIREMENTS:

P166, 32Mb RAM, Win95

WHAT'S ON CD D

ONLINE GAMING SPECIAL IN ASSOCIATION WITH COMPUSERVE

SAVE OVER £40!

If you haven't already got into the world of online gaming then WOW! do we have a deal for you!

PC Gaming World has teamed up with CompuServe and GamesZone to offer our readers TWO MONTHS' FREE membership to the GameZone – worth over £40! Among the multiplayer games on offer are Quake II, Command & Conquer: Red Alert and Age Of Empires

WHAT'S ON CD B

FULLY PLAYABLE DEMOS

Wargasm
Warzone 2100
Shogo Mobile Armor Division
Aries Rising
Star Wars DroidWorks
Microsoft Golf 99
Microsoft Pinball Arcade
Colin McRae Rally (NEW DEMO)
Neophyte Spirit Master
Glover
Jakkal Flesh & Bones (requires D3D compatible accelerator)

PATCHES AND ADD-ONS

Microsoft Combat Flight Sim: The Cobra's Fangs (requires full version of Combat Flight Sim)
Wing Commander: Secret Ops: The Complete Missions
Colin McRae Rally Patch
Quake II Map Pack

FEATURE

Dank & Skuz

ONLINE

- Demon
- Wireplay
- PC Gaming World
- ZDNetUK
- CompuServe
- Lycos

ESSENTIAL UTILITIES

DirectX
WinZip V7.0
Microsoft ActiveMovie
QuickTime
WinAMP
and more

PATCHES AND ADD-ONS

MICROSOFT COMBAT FLIGHT SIM: THE COBRA'S FANGS

Microsoft

A world exclusive, as we present the first official add-on mission to Microsoft's excellent Combat Flight Sim. The morning of 25 July 1944, marked the beginning of the break-out of Allied forces from the D-Day landings in Normandy and spelled the end of German dominance in France. As part of this operation, your squadron will conduct a ground attack mission along the road from Lessay to Periers. Destroy at least half of any German armour you encounter to succeed and watch out for enemy fighter patrols.

Requirements: Full version of Combat Flight Sim

WING COMMANDER: SECRET OPS: THE COMPLETE MISSIONS

Origin Systems

A huge bonus for Wing Commander fans as we present the complete and unabridged Wing Commander Secret Operations pack, which features 56 new single-player missions for WC veterans and newcomers alike.. Annihilate the alien menace with brand new weapons, including the Dust Cannon, Chain Ion and Mosquito Missiles, as well as flying powerful new Confed starships, starfighters, and bombers, all with their own weapons and performance characteristics. Graphic options include support for D3D and Glide 2.43. Before you can play this game you will need to obtain an unlock key from Origin via its site: http://register.secretops.com/register.html

COLIN MCRAE RALLY PATCH

Codemasters

Latest patch to update Mr McRae's rally classic

QUAKE II MAP PACK

All the new maps for PC Gaming World's Quake II server

FULLY PLAYABLE DEMOS

WARGASM

DiD

Experience the future of warfare with DiD's *PC Gaming World* Classic, Wargasm – a terrific blend of strategy, tactics and all-out 3D combat. Wargasm is played out on the lush virtual terrain of the future and this demo gives a brief, but delightful taster of the addictive immersive battlefield action in store.

REQUIREMENTS:

P133, 16Mb RAM, SVGA, Win95, D'rect X

WARZONE 2100

Eidos

Take command of the shattered remnants of humanity and battle for supremacy in the war ravaged post-apocalyptic world of 2100. Warzone 2100 features a fine, next generation 3D engine, customisable units and a huge playing area to explore.

REQUIREMENTS:

P166, 16Mb RAM, SoundBlaster compatibles, Win95

SHOGO: MOBILE ARMOR DIVISION

Monolith

Powered battle suits and mech-inspired mayhem from this eagerly anticipated corridor shooter which combines traditional first-person action, a distinctive Anime visual influ ence and some awesome big Robot battles. Shogo is powered by Monolith's new LithTech engine and this demo provides two levels of blasting action for your pleasure. A quick tip, after you start, quick-save so you avoid having to watch the lengthy introduction sequence each time you reload.

REQUIREMENTS:

P166, 32Mb RAM, Win95

ARIES RISING

Imagine Studios

This rather attractive spaceflight combat sim is the first title from Imagine Studios, a company made up of several ex-Origin employees and Wing Commander veterans. This demo version contains six single-player missions as well as multiplayer options.

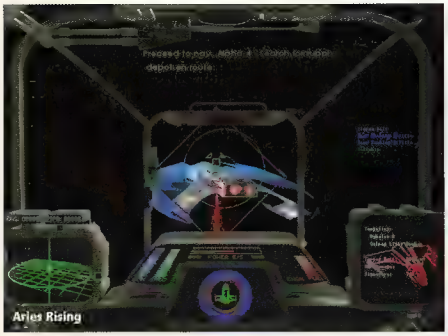
REQUIREMENTS:

P133, 16Mb RAM, SVGA, mouse, DirectX 5.0, Win95

STAR WARS DROIDWORKS

Lucas Learning

DroidWorks places you in the



role of an undercover agent working for the Rebel Alliance in their never-ending mission to defeat the Empire. Disguised as a Jawa, your aim is to become a Master Droid Builder by designing and building droids to help you complete covert assignments.

REQUIREMENTS:

P133, 16Mb RAM, DirectX 6.0, Win95

COLIN MCRAE RALLY (NEW DEMO)

Codemasters

The latest version of the hottest rally game around. In this demo, you can race three challenging tracks in New Zealand, Australia, and Cairo.

REQUIREMENTS:

P166, Win95, 16Mb RAM, 50Mb disk space, Direct X6

MICROSOFT GOLF 99

Microsoft

This demo of Microsoft Golf 1999 provides three holes of play at the Donald Ross Memorial course at the Boyne Highlands Resort & Country Club in Harbor Springs, Michigan.

REQUIREMENTS:

P90, 16Mb RAM, DirectX 5.2, Win95

MICROSOFT PINBALL ARCADE

Microsoft

This demo of Microsoft's pinball wizard includes the classic 1982 table, Haunted House. The full version features the Buffle Ball table from 1931, Humpty Dumpty from 1947, and the Spirit of 76 from 1976, as well as three other classic tables.

REQUIREMENTS:

P90, 16Mb RAM, Win95

NEOPHYTE SPIRIT MASTER

An intriguing new entry from a well established roleplaying series, Neophyte Spirit Master sees you play the role of Neika Mantru, a warrior troubled by visions of a great evil invading the world. The Anime style characters and cute cartoon graphics should win many new fans.

REQUIREMENTS:

Pentium processor, 8Mb RAM, 1Mb SVGA video card supporting 16-bit colour in 640x480, DirectX, Win95

GLOVER

Hasbro Interactive

Give the glove a hand! Guide the wizard's magic glove through six different worlds using magical spells to beat enemies, discover secret sections and crush end of level bosses in Hasbro's unusual action game

REQUIREMENTS:

P133, 16Mb RAM, quad-speed CD, 30Mb free hard drive space, 2Mb SVGA card, DirectX 6, mouse

ESSENTIAL UTILITIES

- DirectX – The essential install for PC gaming!
- DirectX 6.0 Drivers for Windows 95 – Newer, better and faster Direct 3D, Direct Sound and more!
- DirectX 6.0 Drivers for Windows 98 – Newer, better and faster Direct 3D, Direct Sound and more!
- DirectX 5.2 Drivers – In the unlikely event you need to backtrack…
- WinZip V7.0 – Zip File Management for Windows
- Microsoft ActiveMovie – For playing videos and MPGs
- QuickTime – 16-bit and 32-bit versions
- QuickTime 16-bit – 16-bit version
- QuickTime 32-bit – 32-bit version
- WinAMP – Audio player for several types of sounds
- TreeSize – Analyse the size of Folder Trees
- Macro Express – Automate your Windows system
- ZD Net's CookieMaster – Exclusive! Monitor Cookie activity
- PaintShop Pro V5 – Latest upgrade to this popular utility
- PaintShop Pro V5 Extras – Picture Tubes and Sample Images
- SmartWheel – Intellimouse Enhancer
- Vulcan Notes – Computerised Sticky Notes

ONLINE

- Demon – Get online with the Demon Internet Client
- Wireplay – Get online with BT's Wireplay Client
- After Dark/ZDNet online – Get news while you're away from your machine
- Get Online with PC Gaming World – Visit PC Gaming World's Web site now!
- PC Daily News – Up to the minute news from ZDNetUK
- CompuServe Information Manager – Get connected with CompuServe
- CompuServe 2.6a For Windows 3.x Users – Including Internet Explorer
- CompuServe 3.0.4 For Windows 95 Users – Including Internet Explorer
- CompuServe Home Page Wizard – Publish your own home pages on the Internet
- ZDNetUk – Your one-stop site
- On-line Subscription Offers – Subscribe To PC Gaming World now! … and save up to 38%!
- ZD Net Tour – Take a tour online
- Ziff Davis CD Content Listings – Search through all Ziff Davis' CDs since January 97
- Lycos, MS Internet Explorer users – Your Portal to the Web
- Lycos, Netscape Navigator users – Your Portal to the Web

JAKKAL FLESH & BONES

Blaze

You must defeat the evil arch-wizard Zargon and end his reign of terror in this 3D real-time strategy game. Note: If you go into the Campaign menu and hit Enter, the demo will crash, so… don't! Select scenarios and then Drakkan Lair upon entering and once the level has loaded, press the F6, F7, and F8 keys to toggle the projectile list, god favour graph, and mini-map.

REQUIREMENTS:

P233, 32Mb RAM, 3Dfx or D3D compatible accelerator, Win95

DANK AND SCUD

From within the imagination of one crazy Canadian - and already enormously popular on the Web – these are the complete adventures thus far of the comic sensation Dank & Skud. These Quake characters bring their zany style of humour to Quake, Quake II – and now Half-Life!

MASSIVE TOMB RAIDER III SPECIAL

LIMITED EDITION COLLECTOR'S LARA CROFT TOMB RAIDER III CD

On this exclusive Lara Croft CD spectacular you'll find all the following fine things:

EXCLUSIVE! TOMB RAIDER III - MOVIE

Presented here for the first time is the big-budget Lara Croft movie short feature produced to coincide with the launch of Tomb Raider III.

TOMB RAIDER III PLAYABLE DEMO

Join Lara Croft to explore an Indian adventure in this massive, fully playable demo of the fabulous Tomb Raider III. Penetrate the depths of a mysterious Indian temple and explore new moves, face new enemies and control a brand new Lara, in what promises to be the free-lance Tomb Raider's best adventure yet.

LARA CROFT - NEW RENDERS AND IMAGES

All the latest pix and electronic posters of everyone's favourite pin-up!

WALKTHROUGH STRATEGY GUIDE

Come to a dead stop, hit a brick wall, stuck in a hole? Just can't get any further in your Tomb Raiding? Here we present our step-by-step, in-depth guide to completing the first four parts of the Tomb Raider III – India level. Explore the mysteries of the Jungle terrain, sneak through the Temple Ruins, brave the perils of the ancient river Ganges and finally unravel the secrets of the enigmatic Caves of Kaliya with our complete strategy guide! (Guide supplied courtesy of GameSpot UK)

CD LOADING INSTRUCTIONS

Here's how to get your PC Gaming World CD running

1. Turn on your system and allow it to boot
2. Insert your *PC Gaming World* CD into your CD drive tray, close the drive tray and wait for the light to go out

Now you can run the disc from Windows 3.1x or Win95/Win98

TO RUN USING WIN95/WIN98

Click on the Start button and choose Run. Then type d:\go.exe (where d: is your the letter of your CD-ROM drive)

TO RUN USING WINDOWS 3.1

Go to the File Manager icon (the filing cabinet icon in the main menu) and open your CD-ROM drive by clicking on the appropriate drive letter. Now click on go.exe

ABOUT THE INTERFACE

PC Gaming World's interface is arranged into a number of folders. Just double-click on the appropriate folder icon for a list of: Games, Quake, Utilities, Online, and How To Subscribe To *PC Gaming World*. When you double-click on a program, a brief description will appear. Click on the install button in the middle of the screen to copy and run a title

NOTE

Although not all programs featured need a high-spec machine to run, please note that you need at least 256 colours and 1Mb of video RAM in order to load *PC Gaming World*'s front-end program

DISCLAIMER

While we take great care in the selection, testing and installation of software on the *PC Gaming World* CD, Ziff-Davis can accept no responsibility for any data loss or any other damage occurring during the CD-ROM's use. You should always back up your hard drive before installing any new software, especially when installing DirectX programs. *PC Gaming World* cannot guarantee that this CD-ROM disk will work on every PC ever manufactured

PC GAMING WORLD DISC HOTLINE

If you're having problems with this disc – or if the disc is broken – fear not, for help is at hand. Just call our hotline 0870 908 0782 between 9am and 5pm (Monday to Friday – closed bank holidays and weekends). Or drop them an email at pcgwcdhelp@zd.com

DIRECTX PROBLEM, NO PROBLEM

Problems – No Problem! Most Win95/Win98 games need DirectX drivers to run correctly. If a demo starts popping up error messages then it's likely that the DirectX drivers are missing.
To correct this snag, try installing the drivers held in the essentials folder on the CD

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PC Gaming World, December 1998

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